



## Re-thinking music education partnerships through intra-actions

Victoria Kinsella, Martin Fautley & Adam Whittaker

To cite this article: Victoria Kinsella, Martin Fautley & Adam Whittaker (2022): Re-thinking music education partnerships through intra-actions, Music Education Research, DOI: [10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510](https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053510>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 27 Mar 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Re-thinking music education partnerships through intra-actions

Victoria Kinsella <sup>a</sup>, Martin Fautley <sup>a</sup> and Adam Whittaker <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Education and Social Work, Faculty of Education, Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK; <sup>b</sup>Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK

## ABSTRACT

Music education in England has been in a state of flux for a number of years due to the complexities and variability of its delivery. Many of the issues surrounding music education in England are associated with policy and practice in schools, and the complexities of funding and deployment of music activities. This creates contextual, structural and political boundaries, especially on partnership work that seeks to join up provision. This paper presents findings from a four-year longitudinal project that aimed to explore the role of partnership work between schools and out-of-school music providers. It also critiques structural issues and limitations of music education in England, offering new insight and resolutions. Methodologically there has been an emerging interest in diffractive approaches and the intra-actions they produce (Barad [2007] *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Haraway [2008] *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). An important part of the paper is to outline the importance of these novel methodologies that go beyond reflection and raise important questions regarding the role of diffractive and intra-active processes in education research projects. This is a novel consideration, which is pertinent for music education research internationally. The paper concludes with a reconceptualisation of partnership work, and new theoretical underpinnings for future partnerships.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 June 2021

Accepted 7 March 2022

## KEYWORDS

Partnership; intra-action;  
methodology

## Introduction

In England, there is curriculum music in school, specialist instrumental and vocal tuition delivered by visiting teachers, along with a multitude of music organisations providing a range of activities on a short and long term basis, as well as independent music educators teaching aspects of music across genres in independent settings. Henley (2011) observed that this provision was ‘fragmented’ and ‘patchy’. Consequently, there was a demand for change in provision ‘to ensure all pupils receive a high quality music education’ (DfE & DCMS 2011, 7). Recognising this fragmentation, in 2011, the English government supported a National Plan for Music Education (NPME) (DfE & DCMS 2011), which has been significant in altering the music education landscape. It set out to dispel many challenges through the creation of Music Education Hubs that would join up provision and augment music teaching in schools. Not only did the NPME support

**CONTACT** Victoria Kinsella  victoria.kinsella@bcu.ac.uk  School of Education and Social Work, Faculty of Education, Birmingham City University, Birmingham B15 3TN, UK  @drtorikinsella

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

music hubs, but it also aimed to join up delivery across a range of music-making and music learning activities stating

The best model for Music Education includes a combination of classroom teaching, instrumental and vocal music tuition and input from professional musicians. Partnership between organisations is the key to success. (DfE & DCMS 2011, 13)

In this paper, we explore the challenges of partnership working, in particular the issues posed by policy and practice in schools and the complexities of funding and deployment of music activities. Partnership and collaborative communities of musical practice in music education have received increasing attention in recent years, with the work of Kenny (2010, 2014, 2016) showing that there can be issues with both their conceptualising and operationalisation. Kenny (2016, 45) has noted:

Every community of musical practice exists within certain local, national and international contexts. Each one has particular norms, rules, structures, interactions and ‘practices’ distinct to their collective situations.

Partnership research in music education does have a history, with the work of Kushner (1991) also being of significance. Kushner’s (1991, 81) findings of a collaborative project between an orchestral organisation and numerous schools also highlight contradictions between cultures, traditions, and values within partnership:

... professional organising projects need to develop a careful rationale for partnership, which allows individuals to develop within the context of the wider community of artist, teachers and pupils.

Similar conclusions were reached in Norway, where Christophersen’s work (2013, 2015; Christophersen and Kenny 2018) has been an important informant in analysing the transition of knowledge between professionals and young people in a partnership; in particular, focussing attention towards the notion of ‘victory narratives’, which can devalue existing professional expertise and align success with short-term outcomes, which are often not predicated on methodological rigour:

Too often, such initiatives within education tend toward ‘victory narratives’. These dominant discourses ascribe the success of music-in-education initiatives to musicians’ presence and artistic abilities alone, thus ignoring what musical cultures, expertise, and knowledge already exist within these settings prior to the intervention. This is perhaps due to a perceived (or real) need to serve greater political agendas, satisfy multiple stakeholders, create employment opportunities, and attract increased funding. Or perhaps it is due to a lack of criticality in the overall aims, functions, and inherent values of such projects that are often presented as a ‘magic bullet’ for music education. (Kenny and Christophersen 2018, 3)

These studies draw attention to the importance of all involved in a partnership to recognise the mutually beneficial skills and experiences that they can bring to pedagogical and musical exchanges, without compromising the integrity of the musical identities involved. In this paper, we further unpick many of the issues highlighted in the music partnership literature. To do this we will begin by presenting policy to practice discourses present in England and their potential impact on partnership working.

### ***Discourse dichotomy in music education policy***

Although the NPME aimed to address issues of variability, significant discrepancies in the areas of accessibility, musical learning and teaching discourse, and levels of provision remain. Spruce (2013) observed many contradictions and issues within the national plan, including knowledge development and musical knowing, stating that it

... privileges and promotes a relatively limited way of musical knowing, rather than the multiple ways of knowing which characterise inclusive music education practices. This particular way of musical knowing, rooted in the practices of western classical music, does not readily allow for the involvement of individuals

in constructing process, content and decision-making or the deployment of informal learning pedagogies. (Spruce 2013, 29)

Alongside this privileging, another conflict in music education provision in England is the range of discourses, understandings and values associated with musical learning and teaching. The difference between school curriculum policy and out-of-school provision can also be considered disjointed and inequitable. The principal policy driver in English schools is the National Curriculum (NC) (Department for Education 2013). Although the NC offers guidance on content, it does not delineate any form of pedagogy. Neither does it specify how it should be organised. As a result, a number of different ways of structuring the curriculum and of teaching the various aspects involved have emerged, including a centrally produced 'model music curriculum' (DfE 2021).

One common approach to structuring curriculum, especially at key stage three (11–14), has been what Fautley and Colwell (2012, 488) describe as 'assessment backwash'. This is when the curriculum that children and young people would be involved in at key stage four (14–16 years old), typically General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or Business and Technology Education Council (BTec) examinations, is being implemented at key stage three. These examination certificates in music are normally only taken by about 7% of the school population (Daubney, Spruce, and Annetts 2019), and so skewing the curriculum for all pupils towards an exam taken by a few clearly has significant ramifications for music education. Furthering Spruce's (2013) observation regarding inclusivity, Daubney (2016) notes that there is limited opportunity for studying non-western classical music in the new exam syllabus frameworks, again narrowing young people's experience, prescribing forms of knowledge, and lacking diversity.

Acting in some ways as a departure from accepted traditional versions of pedagogy in classroom music teaching is an important movement in music education utilising informal styles of music teaching and learning, grounded on student-centred pedagogic interactions (Folkestad 2006). This has, by and large, arisen from the work of Green (2002, 2008) and is characterised by an approach where 'rather than devising a plan for the learning that will take place, teachers respond as learning unfolds' (Gower 2012). This represents an important distinction between the formal and informal sectors. Planning for learning in schools takes place in advance of lessons and learning encounters, whereas in informal learning, planning by knowing is important in that the teacher or music leader will need to react as learning unfolds. However, the boundaries of formal and informal teaching learning have become increasingly blurred and confusing.

What is evident is that school music education in England is highly controlled, which differs greatly from the largely unregulated world of informal learning and teaching. This is not to say that there are policy matters that are sidelined by informal organisations, but that measures of success, such as a performance, can sometimes be the way in which validation is received. This is different to schools where the performative regime has become 'a policy epidemic' (Levin 1998), with an increased obsession with evidencing learning through quantitative data measures. These policies govern teacher pedagogy and learner experience, where a teacher's personalised pedagogy is challenged by the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball 2003, 1). Performative struggles are not isolated to music teachers and affect schools and schooling more widely. As Rizvi and Lingard (2009, 2–3) observe:

As educational systems around the world have become larger and more complex, governments have been either unable or unwilling to pay for educational expansion, and have therefore looked to market solutions. This led to an almost universal shift from social democratic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance, resulting in policies of corporatization, privatization and commercialization on the one hand, and on a greater demand for accountability on the other.

This is a troubling prospect for any teacher, but for music teachers, in particular, this has shifted the sphere of accountability away from making music and onto its assessment. As Ball (2012)

observes, this re-orders priorities away from student-centred pedagogic interactions towards measurable outcomes.

### ***The complexities of music organisation-musician-teacher-school partnerships***

What this brief overview shows is that there is a complexity of purpose and function with regard to music education in England. At the heart of these discussions lies this dichotomy:

- Music education in school will be evaluated, to a greater or lesser extent, by grades, marks, attainment and progression scores.
- Music education in out-of-school settings will be evaluated, to a greater or lesser extent, by the music produced: the song, the composition, the concert, the recording.

Holdus and Espeland (2013, 5) discern that these dichotomies often lead to issues concerning partnership and the principal focus of each stakeholder:

... we suggest that there is a missing consensus about quality concepts that is paradigmatic by nature between what might be labelled an art paradigm and an education paradigm, where the major goal of the first one is the communication and transmission of the art work and the accompanying artistic experience. We have observed that ... the major goal of teachers co-operating with artists is 'learning'.

It is important to note that although this paper so far has explored the challenges of policy in music education, there is an important symbiotic relationship in all music provision in that it seeks to support learning, musical development and progression. However, as Bresler (2018) observed, the absence of shared expectations hinders collaborations among participants who are enculturated in communities with different value systems, goals, and identities. Therefore, if the complexities of the purpose and function of music education are not investigated, then partnership work will remain disjointed. An important proposition for any partnership work is to bridge divides, widen opportunities and further support young people's musical aspirations.

### ***Re-thinking partnership through research***

In 2014 Youth Music, a national charity that invests in music-making projects that help children and young people develop socially, personally and musically, funded Exchanging Notes, a four-year research programme. Using public funding from the National Lottery via Arts Council England, Exchanging Notes pioneered 10 new partnerships between schools and out-of-school music providers. The programme had two linked aims:

- To support young people at risk of disengagement, low attainment or exclusion from school to achieve the best musical, educational and wider outcomes through participation in the music-making projects.
- To develop new models of partnership working between schools and out-of-school music providers.

The schools were varied and geographically dispersed, including state-funded, academies, a school for profound and multiple learning difficulties, special education needs and difficulties, and a virtual school for looking after young people. The music organisations ranged from those exploring drumming, music technology, music production, one-to-one music exploration, ensemble development and songwriting. Although the project set out to explore the development of ten new partnerships, only seven of these saw the project through to completion. There are various reasons for those projects that did not run for the full four years, many of which are explored throughout the article; however, following ethical procedures, we shall not name the partner

organisations nor present data in relation to those three projects. Therefore, the following table outlines the remaining seven projects, which we refer to throughout this paper.

The Music Education Partnerships	School Context
<p>Music Organisation</p> <p>A performance group with a mix of brass and woodwind players, drummers, steel pan and dancers, who draw influences from the Caribbean, Brazil, Africa and New Orleans.</p>	<p>A state-funded secondary school in South London.</p>
<p>A drumming organisation which delivers creative samba-based drumming sessions.</p>	<p>A state-funded secondary school in East London.</p>
<p>A music organisation which supports music making for children, young people and vulnerable adults.</p>	<p>Two schools in Southampton: A Free School, for students, who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, and an inclusion unit within a state-funded secondary school, for young people at risk of exclusion.</p>
<p>A music organisation with a focus on music, disability, and technology.</p>	<p>A state-funded secondary special school in North London.</p>
<p>A creative music charity, which supports music making for children, young people.</p>	<p>Two state-funded secondary schools, one in Manchester, and one in Bolton.</p>
<p>A Music Education Hub in partnership with a music organisation which supports young people's music making.</p>	<p>A state-funded secondary school and youth base in Warrington.</p>
<p>A Music Education Hub in partnership with a music and arts development organisation.</p>	<p>A virtual secondary school for looking after young people in Derbyshire.</p>

## Methodology

This research aimed to drill down into the complexities of partnership work, explore the value of partnership in relation to music in schools, challenge accepted pedagogies and push boundaries of curriculum. The project was evaluated by a team of music education researchers from Birmingham City University. In a study that explored partnership, it was important to understand factors that contributed to thought, action and the construction of meaning. Therefore, a modified action research cycle (Carr and Kemmis 1986) was chosen. This posed an interesting methodological variant in that the results of the research feedback directly into project practices. Data were also debated and critiqued at twice-yearly research meetings, which all projects, funders and researchers attended.

The study used a mixed-methods approach, including lesson observations, interviews and perception surveys with in-school teachers, out-of-school music organisation music leaders, and young people, as well as involving statistical analysis of young people's attainment and attendance. In the final year of the project, some music hub leads and headteachers were also interviewed. In this article, we refer to these groups as 'teachers', 'music leaders', 'young people', 'music hub leads', and 'headteachers'. These methods offered insight into educational development, practice and pedagogy by gathering multiple perspectives to understand the backdrop of the wider socio, economic, political and historical nature of learning contexts (Engeström 1999). Trust was a critical factor in the project, developed through a groundedness in knowledge, reliability and understanding. These factors enabled the teachers, music leaders and young musicians to engage with the researchers and each other in relationships and interactions, which had a level of commitment.

For this paper, we have chosen to concentrate on the interview data, as they provided rich narratives of experience. Interviews were conducted three times per year, over four years, with 46 music leaders, 15 teachers, 45 young people, 4 headteachers and 4 music hub leads. Teacher and music leader interviews took place after lesson observations. This was to enable a space for both teacher and music leader to pause and consider the impact of the session. The researcher guided the discussion with questions exploring the session's strengths and weaknesses, the potential for further improvements, impact on practice and pedagogy, and young people's engagement and progression. Interviews with young people, music hub leads and headteachers took place at suitable times based

on availability. The young people's interviews explored similar questions to the teachers and music leaders and included the impact of practice on their musical development and engagement. The music hub lead and headteacher interviews looked at the wider structural successes and challenges of a project such as Exchanging Notes and the impact on young people's musical development.

The interview data collected were analysed from an interpretive perspective that recognised the subjective nature of the responses. They were transcribed and coded, during which process textual data were disassembled, broken apart into lines, paragraphs or sections, then rearranged through coding to produce a new understanding that explored 'similarities, differences, across a number of different cases' (Ezzy 2013, 94). Following this data analysis, further reflection, categorisation and subcategorisation took place where necessary (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011).

### ***Collaborations developing into intra-actions***

By taking a collaborative approach, analysis went beyond reflection towards something more diffusive and intra-active (Barad 2007). Both Barad (2007) and Haraway (2008) have stressed issues with reflection as a means of gaining knowledge, grounded on a representational paradigm and an epistemological framework, which is reductive. Indeed, Haraway (1997, 16) stated that

reflexivity has been much recommended as a critical practice, but my suspicion is that reflexivity, like reflection, only displaces the same elsewhere, setting up worries about copy and original and the search for the authentic and really real.

Instead, the open and fluid nature between the researchers and participants in the intra-active process moved analysis beyond a critique of reflection. Incidentally, the reflective, individual orientation is a product of the market and neoliberal perspective of education. However, in the intra-active process there is no researcher or participant as an independent subject; instead, relationality focuses on connections between human and non-human, in this case, music produced, instruments and musical interactions. But this move away from reflection was important for Exchanging Notes, as it would have been limiting to consider those working in the music environment as separate, in a music education environment that is inherently social.

For many project partners, this process broke from 'the phallogocentric mirror' (Rose 1995, 779) and exposed the fragility of power, theorising new educational spaces, alternative approaches to knowledge, politics and ethics. Unlike reflective interaction, which presupposes entities that pre-exist with one another, these intra-actions focus on engaging in entanglements that emerge from intra-relating. The intra-actions were a way for the participants to see themselves as part of an educational music terrain, in which by intra-acting, they can act with and on each other in productive and meaningful ways.

An ethical mind-set was at the heart of this approach. Working in this manner required trust, safety and consent, which was continually reviewed. The research was approved by the University Ethics Committee and was conducted in adherence with the British Education Research Association (BERA 2018) guidelines on ethical practice in educational research.

### ***The problem of fixed ontologies in partnerships***

The pressures of performativity and assessment on schools were evident in many of the Exchanging Notes projects, as they became regimes of truth. In a similar fashion to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), who recognised that 'all pedagogic action is objectively 'symbolic violence' these policies and practices were deeply embedded, where the teachers and learners began to view them as the natural order of things, making the teachers and learners musically subordinate:

The focus on data means that sometimes you forget about the music. (Teacher)

I'm torn between a rock and a hard place because we're under a lot of pressure to improve results here.  
(Teacher)

Just as the schools were controlled by performative regimes, the informal music organisations were also engrained in specific practices, in their cases, grounded in the 'doing' of music. Doing is important, especially in music education, but activity is not a substitute for learning. For many music projects, working in the longitudinal fashion afforded by the Exchanging Notes project was significantly different from their previous practices, which tended typically towards working with schools on short-term object-orientated outcomes. The doing of the activity exceeded consideration of the learning that was taking place and the short- and long-term impact on musical progress and progression. This limited their understanding of planning for learning:

Previously we didn't look at the learning too much in our projects because I think our focus was getting them doing. I think it was intrinsically in there but it was definitely not part of the planning process for our learning outcomes. (Music leader)

Due to these factors, in the first year of Exchanging Notes, two main modes of the partnership were enacted. Firstly, the role of the teacher became subservient. Holdus and Espeland (2013, 29) notes that in some partnerships the 'child and musician formed a team, fighting against what they perceived to be oppression of creativity by the teacher and school'. This was true for some of the projects, where the teachers took on a facilitative role, enabling the intervention to take place but remaining distant from the learning:

I think quite often arts and music projects can arrive in a place and the young people will see those as the cool guys coming in to do something really exciting. I am not really sure where that leaves me, it is hard to know what my place is. (Teacher)

I helped facilitate the project but didn't teach, I wasn't really too sure of my role. In many ways I felt like [named music leader] didn't really want to know my thoughts. (Teacher)

On the other hand, some teachers reinforced a formal pedagogical approach to learning, which denied the music leaders the opportunity to explore informal pedagogies within the classroom. Instead, performative and assessment regimes dominated practice, exercising symbolic violence on not only the teacher, but also the music leader:

... the assessments mute me. I'm like what do I do with this! I would like to teach like this, but I can't. I don't feel like I should be doing it the schools way. (Music leader)

... I'm not able to tick the boxes and I feel like I'm becoming the tick box person. I don't like it. (Music leader)

... assessment and planning are always on my mind. I constantly ask are they learning enough according to the school? I do think thinking about outcomes are important, but also if you're going to become a musician you need to learn how to work with people. And it's also those little things that I feel are important, the additional learning, but then I'm not always sure how do I sell this to the school? It's a challenge. (Music leader)

These examples highlight the hierarchical nature of the partnership, where either the music leader or teacher, positioned as an expert, was granted power. Building partnerships was, therefore, problematic due to competing agendas, paradigms and measures of success. Pedagogies and approaches to learning and doing were bound by innate practices that tended to go unquestioned, were 'invisible', 'ritualistic', and 'taken for granted' (Kinsella 2014, 307).

### ***Ontological re-framing: towards a re-conceptualisation of music education partnerships***

These practices were historically accumulative, informed by social and historical contexts of working in the formal or informal sectors. To move beyond these, teachers and music leaders had to break from self-reflection and its epistemological grounding in reductionist ways of thinking. Haraway (2008)

reminds us that reflexivity merely emphasises sameness and separateness, often meaning sameness is displaced elsewhere. Therefore, teachers and music leaders had to become meaningfully attentive to how differences were made and the effects of these differences on partnership work. The policies discussed earlier brought into force certain kinds of social and professional control. Foucault (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 18) notes that ‘people know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does’. To resist these hegemonic practices, the partners had to negotiate new relational approaches. The critique was not about deconstructing held truths, revoking policies or practices, but a positive engagement with one another; it was not about being ‘the one who debunks, but the one who assembles’ (Latour 2004, 231).

As was noted above, an important element of this research was its longitudinal nature. Tension and anxiety surrounded the exploration of new practices; teachers and music leaders were defensive of their approaches, epistemologies and ethos:

... it takes time to build up the trust and I think that at the beginning we didn’t know where we both stood. (Teacher)

... I was coming from one perspective, they were coming from another and it all just takes times for those things to be ironed out. (Music leader)

Over the four years, the research process re-focused responsiveness towards explorations of musical partnership, the benefits for teaching and learning and the implications for music education. This drove many of the projects to think beyond ‘business as usual’, and explore where concepts, practices and meanings combine, overlap, bend, or encounter an obstruction:

It’s about sitting down and be open with one another. It’s about constructively critical but that doesn’t come straight away. We both observed each other’s practice and then were able to understand each other better. (Teacher)

I think it’s about that fluidity between doing and learning, through making, learning through thinking and thinking through learning. (Music leader)

One of the central processes in this re-framing was dialogic conversations about teaching, which yielded useful insights into pedagogy and music activity. More often than not, a sense of diversity became apparent, which led to constructive explorations of alternative pedagogies and practices:

... it’s much harder, to unpack the specifics of what we are doing but we are constantly questioning one another. Why are you doing this? For what reason? What is the learning? I would have done it like this, what do you think? (Teacher)

It was important for me to understand how to frame this in light of the curriculum but also explore with the teacher ways in which it could also remain open. (Music Leader)

Pedagogic behaviours by which they had come to ‘know’ began to shift away from institutionalised notions of pedagogy and instruction towards something more social, cultural and expansive. There was a distilling of the institutional instinct as new discourses and perspectives emerged, opening up spaces of intra-action (Barad 2007):

The project became something that was collaboratively planned and delivered. We needed to learn from each other’s best practices, but also learn from each other’s mistakes. Sometimes approaches were the same but often they were different. It was about how you accept that but find ways to join them together. (Teacher)

We have very different styles based on formal and informal approaches. However, I can see them doing things in their own musical language and I feed off that. That is an organic working relationship. (Music Leader)

Another important feature was the inclusion of the young people as pedagogical change makers. Involving them in decision-making processes helped de-territorialise partnership, putting a clear focus on learning. The young people were invited to access new and previously closed-off knowledge by joining the intra-active process of knowledge exchange:

I'm learning new stuff, you're learning new stuff. I'm telling you stuff, you're telling me stuff. It's kind of like that. (Young person)

It has been good to work with both [teacher] and [music leader], I think they bring different stuff to the lessons. I can also bring in my own ideas, which is good. (Young person)

These approaches accounted for relational understandings and acknowledged that knowledge is not just about reaching a musical standard, but also it is communicative and discursive.

Finally, although there are issues regarding the symbolic violence of music education policy discourses that can cause division between the theoretical underpinnings of the formal and informal sectors, projects that were intra-active with one another evidenced profound re-thinking of policy into practice (Bourdieu 1990; Powell, Smith, and D'Amore 2017). Teachers, music leaders and learners re-authored their understandings of what it meant to 'be' and 'become' in the musical process, creating non-hegemonic alternatives to music education. Because of this, many of the projects were able to sidestep or neutralise former modes of teaching bound by previous ideologies and pedagogies towards practices that were more future-orientated:

I feel now at the end of the project that I have a deep understanding of the demands of the curriculum and how to work with schools in the future. (Music leader)

I have learnt a lot about their (music organisation) practice and their approaches to teaching and learning that has come directly back into my classroom. I think it's also helped the pupils see me in a different light, they know now that I'm not just a teacher but I am also a musician too. (Teacher)

I have established new ways of working, which go beyond the focus on school outcomes and helped me to really engage with creative music making and myself as a musician. (Teacher)

I realise the importance of thinking about the long-term plan for someone's progression, although also allowing it to be open to change. But having a route in mind is important. (Music Leader)

However, as noted earlier, this research was not about presenting a victory narrative. A partnership is difficult and challenging but can yield opportunities that extend learning and development for all involved. In *Exchanging Notes*, this was most effective when there was a close linkage between music providers and schools, so that each came to understand more clearly the issues and advantages of other ways of working. It was less effective when organisations and schools simply reverted to previous ways of working, ones with which they were comfortable. Within the diffractive and intra-active process, there were often times of discomfort and unease. This was due to participants finding it difficult to adapt to new ways of thinking and being, internal organisational pressures and outcomes. It is also important to note that although a diffractive and intra-active process worked for many, it was not universally successful. Three of the original ten projects discontinued their involvement. The requirements of fluidity in the research process proved difficult. As Rajchman (2000, 7) states: 'to make connections one needs not knowledge, certainty, but rather a trust that something may come out, though one is not yet completely sure what'. For some projects, perhaps, this was too much of a leap into the unknown.

### ***The intra-active process creating a non-hegemonic alternative to music education***

The ontological re-framing through the research intra-actions called into question the parameters of what a non-hegemonic alternative to music education could look like and the role of partnership. Many of the partnerships were predicated on particular socio-spatial issues of power and discursive structures. These were threatening and limiting. However, over time, new spaces that accounted for a multiplicity of understandings, were created.

Projects that looked for instantiation beyond the superficial found that the research methodology was significant. This is especially important in a market-driven education context, which focuses on the instant and surface nature of learning. We have classified the process as intra-active

(Barad 2007). In these intra-actions, new understandings emerged within the relations, not outside them. This ethical mind-set meant that success was not measured on a priori calculations. Agency arose from unpicking complex relations with others, learning was in constant flow, and identity always unfolding:

... there's been this real understanding of change, that we are in an ever changing kind of context and that it's flexible. (Music leader)

At the beginning of the project, we all came into the project with our own ideas and specific outcomes that we wanted to achieve. In the early stages of the partnership this just didn't work, we jarred a lot because we had these different expectations and things in mind for the outcomes for the young people. Over time, meetings or just brief conversations started to become more productive and collaborative. We had to be honest with one another in the process, outlining what we did or didn't agree with and it was only through that, that we were able to move forward and really think about what a new way of working together might be. (Music leader)

I think being part of a research process helped, because we were encouraged to think in a different way and to question one another in a different way. (Music leader)

This is significant for all partnership work, not just that in music education. A partnership is not about situating different approaches to music education against another, but rather a careful reading of ideas through and with each other, leading to new and inventive provocations (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012). To learn and be within this process the participants had to move themselves in a space where relationships with others became the focus, instead of paying attention to the entanglements of joining up practice. At the heart of the project was a mode of social interaction that required a need to change and interact with others through and for change.

## **(In)conclusion**

We have seen throughout this paper that partnership, collaboration and musical learning are heavily incorporated into, and influenced by, political agendas. The very notion of joining up practice outlined in the NPME was ethically flawed. Before entering a partnership and joining up practices, in-depth understandings of each other's ontological and epistemological positions are needed. It is only from that point onwards that relational ontologies can be co-developed.

In *Exchanging Notes*, we unpicked the complex network of discursive forces surrounding music education practice within the formal and informal sectors. These diffractive readings and intra-actions pointed attention away from unidimensional explorations towards more complex political and social analyses, which enabled partners to consider multiple meanings. Three key features impacted the exchanging notes partnerships:

- (1) Analysis of others' pedagogical processes through intra-actions;
- (2) The exploration of ways of being and becoming musical within non-hegemonic spaces;
- (3) The development of new discourses and theoretical underpinnings for working together that reconceptualised music education partnerships.

The most significant aspect binding these three facets together is each partners' greater realisation of what each other actually did. This may seem like a simplistic outcome, but underlying it are issues of ontology and axiology. Realising that the work of teachers was hemmed in by regulatory requirements and accountability on the micro-level was not always appreciated by the music providers.

I knew that students has assessments in school, but I never quite realised just how much it played a role in the classroom. (Music Leader)

In a similar vein, schools did not recognise the time constraints in relation to music providers' work, the multiple deadlines, simultaneous projects and musical activities that all need tending to and the fact that their working processes were not aligned to assessment and performative

regimes. There are also market condition pressures; music organisations have to be financially independent and, therefore, could be in an economically precarious situation.

In future partnership developments, this warrants careful handling, and how this is done requires a tactful and sensitive awareness of the ontologies of others. A throwaway comment could wreck an emergent partnership, and being inadvertently dismissive of others' situations could be problematic. This division in approach is narrated by Björk (2018, 3), who although presenting a caricature representation of teacher and music leader interaction, the issues of ontology are clearly expressed:

Two cartoonish, worst-case scenarios are immediately available. Musicians may sail in with an attitude that says, 'Hello, inferior human beings! Bow to the star/genius.' Teachers may roll their eyes at the pedagogically and socially inept artist who 'doesn't know anything about children, classroom management, or the music that is relevant to young people'.

Being open to understanding and sharing ideologies for partnership projects is vital if they are to succeed and if they are to be of mutual benefit to all participants involved.

Exchanging Notes has opened up wider discussions regarding teaching and learning practices for a twenty-first-century music curriculum and the potentialities of and for joining up practice. We know that many school music departments contain only one or very few music teachers, time is being reduced in school timetables, and that the curriculum is not inclusive (Daubney and Mackrill 2018). A partnership can play a significant role in the future of music education. When schools come into contact with different musical modalities, fresh thinking can produce new curriculum ideas. One of the constant issues in KS3 (11–14) music in English schools, is that it is being used as preparation for GCSE (14–16 examinations). However, as noted earlier, we know that only about 7% of young people go on to take music GCSE. This is not ethical, and nor does it offer a complete picture of musical understanding and knowledge. Exchanging Notes has revealed that when schools and music providers work in tandem it can have beneficial impacts on young people and leave a lasting legacy in the schools where it takes place. Teaching and learning practices can be developed, content updated, and new musician role models encountered. Of course, this all comes with a cost, but it would be a useful way of developing new curricula fit for the twenty-first century.

Although these findings are significant for music education, the place of research concerning musicians in school projects warrants further attention. As we have observed, true research is not about the production of 'victory narratives'. It is concerned with a methodologically robust research programme intended to look beyond the surface, engage with problematising assumptions, looking for evidence beyond the superficial, open questioning, and finding ways to develop practice and pedagogy. For future projects involving research, understanding its place and role takes time and trust needs to be established so it can take place effectively. From the discussions throughout this paper, we can conclude that diffractive readings and intra-actions create spaces for future practices to be re-imagined. Most notably, all involved became aware that they were unconsciously reproducing and perpetuating the problematic binaries of formal and informal music education. The continual process of working with the data enabled us to see the problematic ways in which language, thought and practice expanded and restricted experience. By the end of this research we could see value in diffractive readings and the intra-actions they create 'to give a new or different direction to thinking' (Mazzei 2014, 108). Further explorations into the value and place of these methodological possibilities are needed, especially in educational partnerships that want to explore the notion of exchange and partnership like Exchanging Notes.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This research was funded by the National Foundation for Youth Music.

## Notes on contributors

**Victoria Kinsella** is a senior research fellow in education researching arts education and creativity. She has worked on a large number of internationally recognised creative arts research projects in various contexts, including schools, prisons, galleries, arts centres and with educational agencies. Her research interests include creativity, partnership, inclusion and assessment. She is a BERA creativities SIG co-convenor and a Birmingham City University STEAM fellow. Victoria's research has been published in leading education journals.

**Martin Fautley** is a Professor of education at Birmingham City University, England. For many years he was a UK school music teacher and ran a music centre. After this he undertook a full-time Ph.D., working in the education and music faculties at Cambridge University, researching teaching, learning, and assessment of classroom music-making, with a focus on composing as a classroom activity. He is known internationally for his work on assessment in music education. His research on the longstanding 'Listen Imagine Compose' project is also internationally renowned. He has significant research in musical inclusion in mainstream classroom settings for all children and young people. Alongside these areas, he is also currently investigating notions of progression in music education and what is meant by this terminology; what is entailed in creativity when it is applied to music education, particularly composing music; and trajectories in musical learning generally especially in the novice stages.

**Adam Whittaker** is Head of Pedagogy at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. He is an internationally recognised musicologist and music education research specialist, who has worked across a number of research projects working with young people, teachers, and the wider musical community. He regularly gives invited talks, with recent highlights including Bodleian Library (University of Oxford), All Souls College (Oxford), Heidelberg University, and Royal College of Music. Adam was a member of the research team for the Youth Music Exchanging Notes programme, researching the musical lives of vulnerable children at risk of leaving education prematurely, was featured in national media. He is part of an advisory group on music education data policy in England. Adam's research has been published in leading music education and musicological journals, and he is the co-editor of two volumes of essays exploring the representations of music in stage and screen media, and issues of representation within the classical music sector. He is currently a co-investigator on the AHRC Network 'Representing Classical Music in the 21st Century'.

## ORCID

Victoria Kinsella  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8931-9701>

Martin Fautley  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3157-4854>

Adam Whittaker  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1839-2228>

## References

- Ball, S. J. 2003. "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity." *Journal of Education Policy* 18 (2): 215–228.
- Ball, S. J. 2012. *Global Education: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- BERA. 2018. *Ethical Guidelines for Education Research*. 4th ed. London: British Educational Research Association.
- Björk, C. 2018. "A Review Essay: Musician-Teacher Collaborations: Altering the Chord." *International Journal of Education & the Arts* 20: 1–7.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P., and J. C. Passeron. 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. Theory, Culture and Society*. London: Sage.
- Bresler, L. 2018. "Collaborative Journeys Across Pedagogical Cultures: Attunement and the Interplay of Knowing and Unknowing." In *Musician-Teacher Collaborations - Altering the Chord*, edited by C. Christophersen and A. Kenny, ix–xv. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Carr, W., and S. Kemmis. 1986. *Becoming Critical*. Lewes: Falmer Press.
- Christophersen, C. 2013. "Helper, Guard or Mediator? Teachers' Space for Action in the Cultural Rucksack, a Norwegian National Program for Arts and Culture in Schools." *International Journal of Education and the Arts* 14 (1:11): 1–17.
- Christophersen, C. 2015. "Changes and Challenges in Music Education: Reflections on a Norwegian Arts-in-Education Programme." *Music Education Research* 17 (4): 365–380.

- Christophersen, C., and A. Kenny. 2018. *Musician-Teacher Collaborations: Altering the Chord*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., L. Manion, and K. Morrison. 2011. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Daubney, A. 2016. *GCSE Music for First Teaching in September 2016*. London: ISM – Incorporated Society of Musicians.
- Daubney, A., and D. Mackrill. 2018. *Changes in Secondary Music Curriculum Provision over Time 2016–18/19*. Accessed April 2021. <https://www.ism.org/images/images/SUMMARY-Changes-in-Secondary-Music-Curriculum-Provision-2016-18.pdf>.
- Daubney, A., G. Spruce, and D. Annetts. 2019. *Music Education: State of the Nation. All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education*. London: Incorporated Society of Musicians.
- DfE. 2013. *The National Curriculum in England – Framework Document*. London: DfE.
- DfE. 2021. *Model Music Curriculum: Key Stages 1 to 3. Non-Statutory Guidance for the National Curriculum in England*. London: Department for Education.
- DfE and DCMS. 2011. *The Importance of Music – A National Plan for Music Education*. London: Department for Education, and Department for Culture, Media, and Sport.
- Dolphijn, R., and I. Van der Tuin. 2012. *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Michigan: Open Humanities Press.
- Dreyfus, H. L., and P. Rabinow. 1982. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Engeström, Y. 1999. “Activity Theory and Individual and Social Transformation.” In *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, edited by Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R. L. Punamäki, 19–38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ezzy, D. 2013. *Qualitative Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Fautley, M., and R. Colwell. 2012. “Assessment in the Secondary School Classroom.” In *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*. Vol. 1, edited by G. Welch and G. McPherson, 478–494. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Folkestad, G. 2006. “Formal and Informal Learning Situations or Practices vs Formal and Informal Ways of Learning.” *British Journal of Music Education* 23 (2): 135–145.
- Gower, A. 2012. “Integrating Informal Learning Approaches into the Formal Learning Environment of Mainstream Secondary Schools in England.” *British Journal of Music Education* 29 (1): 13–18.
- Green, L. 2002. *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education*. London: Ashgate.
- Green, L. 2008. *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Haraway, D. 1997. *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium: FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Henley, D. 2011. *Music Education in England*. London: DCMS/DfE.
- Holdus, K., and M. Espeland. 2013. “The Visiting Artist in Schools: Arts Based or School Based Practices?” *International Journal of Education and the Arts* 14: 1–10.
- Kenny, A. 2010. “Too Cool for School? Musicians as Partners in Education.” *Irish Educational Studies* 29 (2): 153–166.
- Kenny, A. 2014. “Sound Connections for Institutional Practice: Cultivating ‘Collaborative Creativity’ Through Group Composition.” In *Developing Creativities in Higher Music Education: International Perspectives and Practices*, edited by P. Burnard, 469–493. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kenny, A. 2016. *Communities of Musical Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kenny, A., and C. Christophersen. 2018. “Musical Alterations: Possibilities for Musician–Teacher Collaborations.” In *Musician-Teacher Collaborations*, edited by C. Christophersen and A. Kenny, 3–12. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kinzella, V. 2014. “Breaking the Narrative: Addressing the Loss of Creativity in Secondary Key Stage Three Art and Design Education in England.” Doctor of Philosophy, Birmingham City University.
- Kushner, S. 1991. *The Children’s Music Book: Performing Musicians in School*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Latour, B. 2004. “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2): 225–248.
- Levin, B. 1998. “An Epidemic of Education Policy: What Can We Learn for Each Other?” *Comparative Education* 34 (2): 131–142.
- Mazzei, L. A. 2014. “Beyond an Easy Sense: A Diffractive.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 20: 742–746.
- Powell, B., G. D. Smith, and A. D’Amore. 2017. “Challenging Symbolic Violence and Hegemony in Music Education Through Contemporary Pedagogical Approaches.” *Education 3-13* 45 (6): 734–743.
- Rajchman, J. 2000. *The Deleuze Connections*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Rizvi, F., and B. Lingard. 2009. *Conceptions of Education Policy. Globalizing Education Policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rose, G. 1995. “Distance, Surface, Elsewhere: A Feminist Critique of the Space of Phallogocentric Self/Knowledge.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 761–781.
- Spruce, G. 2013. “Participation, Inclusion, Diversity and the Policy of English Music Education.” In *Reaching Out: Music Education with Hard to Reach Children and Young People*, edited by C. Harrison and P. Mullen, 23–31. London: Music Mark.