Giving Value to Musical Creativity

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Music is often considered to be inherently creative (Webster 1990). However, there are a wealth of differing perspectives and definitions of creativity (Sawyer 2003) which make it difficult for music educators to define and recognise in the classroom. The landmark advisory document by the NACCCE (1999), entitled 'All our futures: Creativity, Culture and Education', located creativity at the centre of education (Jeffery and Craft 2004; Robinson 2001). One of the main characterisations to emerge from the report was the importance of creativity as amenable to being accessed by all. This was referred to by Craft (2001b) as democratic creativity, where everyone is seen to be capable of creativity.

This perception of creativity aligns with Paynter's (1970: 3) definition of musical creativity, which he describes as a language central to humanity:

> …music springs from a profound response to life itself. It is a language, and, as a vehicle for expression it is available in some degree to everyone…music is a rich means of expression and we must not deny our children the chance to use it.

For Paynter, music education should be centred on the individual, , respecting their perceptions and insights. In England, the Plowden Report (1967) played an important role in repositioning the music teacher /as a learner facilitator who encourages learners to engage in music actively, rather than a transmitter of knowledge about music. In both Paynter's definition and the Plowden report, a 'child centred' education is emphasised, and the subjective experience of the learner is significant. Overall, there is agreement in the music education community that creativity is a central aspect of music making and important in the development of a musical identity (Burnard 2012).

Cook however, reminds us of the difficulties of simply referring to creativity as an individual entity, and asks us to reconsider it as plural, where an individual can be involved in multiple creativities. Instead of the traditional view of creativity as an individual endeavour, Cook suggests that everyday creativity is not an individual gift or the act of genius, like that of Mozart, but instead that everyday creativity is something which 'revolves round social interaction, and is embedded and embodied in the practices of everyday life' (2012: 451). This extends the view of creativity from a romantic viewpoint of the lone creative genius to the social and cultural contexts in which a creative work is produced. Burnard (2012:5) argues that the notion of high art orthodoxies that exalt the individual genius s an out-dated misconception, which promotes a single western narrative, and if taught in such a fashion, can marginalise other forms of musical creativity:

> While some children prefer to work alone…others prefer to engage collaboratively, communally, collectively, technologically networked, whereupon being a group member responsible for jointly authoring a piece that can be replayed across time, space, and persons
>
> (Burnard 2012: 279-280).

Similarly, Hargreaves *et al.* call this an 'outmoded and hierarchical value system' (2002: 13), resulting in misconceptions about creative processes and what it looks like in a learning context.

We know that young children learn musical practices informally and socially with their community of peers. Sawyer (2003) claims that creative music making should be encouraged through collaborative practices where communication, verbal or through sound take precedence and that teachers or educators should encourage socialised musical practices as a way to transmit musical knowledge. In this framing of musical creativity, working in groups and learning from peers are key aspects of the creative process. Widely in music education, this is evident in ensembles, choirs or band based teaching and learning where a collective group come together. Sawyer (2015) relates this to Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) theory of 'flow', but reconceptualises it as group flow to signify the importance of a collective group working together and music making as a communicative activity.

Creative Teaching and learning.

Paynter (1974:1) stated/maintained 'education reform starts in the classroom'. This locates the role of teachers, as agent of change. Influences on teacher's musical creativity can include their own music education at school, undergraduate level study, as well as activities outside of school. If trained, as a music teacher understandings and musical knowledge will also be transformed and framed through postgraduate courses and the professional teaching environment from within the classroom.

As Kinsella notes, 'teachers can often lack direction when it comes to developing creativity and succumb to safe and ritualistic practices' (Kinsella 2014). Creative teaching therefore, involves teachers taking creative risks and encouraging this in their learners. Best *et al.*, (2004) also state that creative teaching involves making learning relevant, where teachers make connections to prior learning experiences and value learner contribution to knowledge. Woods (1990) notes that making connections encourages the passing back of control to learners, which promotes innovatory action. The connection between the teacher and learners is therefore integral to the development of creativity.

Furthermore, what the literature highlights is the centrality of the learner in the development of creativity, where emphasis is placed on the process of

learning rather than the creative output (Jeffrey and Craft: 2004). In the music classroom, learners will produce creative work if their creative behaviours are encouraged and supported. Craft's (2001a) notion of 'little C creativity' is a central aspect to musical creativity in the classroom, where learners are encouraged to produced new and personalised pieces of work.

What does valuing young people's musical creativity entail?

Carl Rogers (cited in Vernon 1970: 137-138) questions the social agenda for creativity and how the everyday person can achieve a creative act. He states:

> In education, we tend to turn out conformists, stereotypes, individuals whose education is 'completed' rather than freely creative and original thinkers.

This interrogates the nature of the education system and the approaches taken within an educational environment. Understanding what the musical creative process entails is therefore important for both teachers and learners.

One of the first models aimed at understanding the creative process was by Wallas (1926: 69-73) who broke it down into four stages: 'preparation'; 'incubation'; 'illumination' and 'verification'. This four-stage model is considered a fruitful method for understanding the creative process and is explained by Wallas as such: preparation involves using analytical skills to define a problem to investigate. Following this, the problem is incubated, where the individual takes a break from the problem in order to offer space. This space allows the individual to make associations. Lubart (2010: 296) suggests that during this time 'the unconscious mind rejects most of the combinations as useless but occasionally finds a promising idea'. During illumination, the idea flourishes like an 'enlightenment' (ibid 296). After this phase is verification, where the individual evaluates and refines the creative idea.

Musical creativity can be demonstrated through all forms of music making, however it has most closely been aligned to composition and improvisation. Both composition and improvising are regarded as the main musical activities that generate new ideas (Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves 2009) and thus are seen to develop knowledge of the creative process. Burnard and Younker's (2004) adapted four-stage model of creativity seen in figure one, follows Wallas' (1926) four-stage model of creativity by exploring the composing process. Centrally it highlights its non-linearity which according to Burnard and Younker (2004: 64) stimulates 'multi-dimensional pathways of composing routes'. It also breaks down the composing process, clearly highlighting the importance of stages of learning towards a creative product.
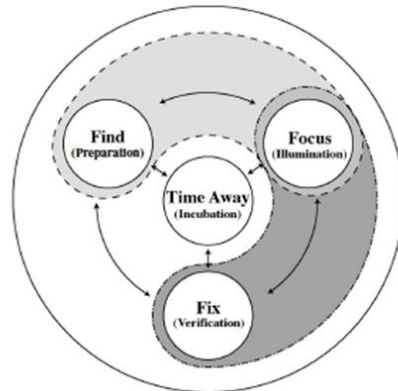
Figure 1: Adapted four-stage creativity model (Burnard and Younker 2004: 65)

Within this model, a non-linear progression is explicit, where a learner moves between different stages of the creative process. This includes exploring, experimenting and play with ideas, time given for their incubation, leading towards the final preparation.

In contrast, Lupton and Bruce (2010) argue that skills need to be internalised before creativity can be achieved. However, according to Paynter (2002) this promotes a viewpoint of musical creativity as being foregrounded in skill and technique which moves away from the notion that being human is sensory, and through symbolic thought we come to know and understand (Langer 1953/1982). For example, children's music making at an early stage is characterized by expression, often not conforming to any specific rules, in terms of structure, character, or style. This form of creativity in music does not depend on any kind of previous knowledge, skill or understanding. Paynter (1982) also observed that it is possible be creative in music without knowledge of past music, and in this sense a knowledge context is not essential. Paynter asserts that music 'could be conceptualised as thought in itself and that to think music was of a different order to thinking about it' (Finney 2011). This gives music a distinctive epistemological standpoint that distinguishes it from other subjects and removes it from the skill and technique versus creative divide. Indeed Spruce (1996:175) also highlights the dangers of the skill versus creative divide claiming that this position could create a 'fragment' in the teaching of music, whereby many leaners become excluded and different forms of musical knowledge are posed as less creative. This again also centralises the role of the teacher to understand and promote teaching approaches centred on process rather than discrete skills.

This is not to say that developing musical skill is not important. But it does mean that stages of creative learning need to be recognised. Often in latter

musical learning stages, musical skill becomes more central and learning becomes more product-oriented rather than process-oriented (Hickey 1999), with musical creativity being characterized by more advanced use of musical elements (Swanwick and Tillman 1986). However, what is important is that these notions of musical creativity are characterised by an understanding of the dynamic nature of the creative process, which includes aspects such as play, expression, experimentation, and the development of skill, over time. Centrally the notion of progression is important and is appropriately linked to individual development.

The current climate of accountability in classroom education

Paynter's views on teaching, learning, and content in classroom music education were considered by many to be revolutionary at the time. Fast forward to now, and in today's climate of schooling, we know that internationally our young people have become the most tested generation. Writing about England, Mansell noted that

> …testing children has been the government's defining education policy. The purpose has been not just to find out what each child has learnt. The results have also been used to hold the schools to account as never before for their pupils' performance.

> (Mansell 2007: xiv)

If we think of music educators in schools, they too have had to follow what is required of them by school leadership teams. One of Paynter's observations, made in 2002, was very prescient regarding the current state of accountability for music teachers. He wrote:

> We seem to have reached a point where we accept without question the possibility of evaluating all learning in terms which will have the same meaning across the curriculum. As a consequence, we may all too easily allow ourselves to be trapped by compromise, making important what can most easily be evaluated rather than valuing what is important. In which case, why do we bother with `other ways of coming to know' which, although they may be assessed, cannot be evaluated? – notably, anything that relies upon the exercise of imagination, creative response, and the expression of independent views.

> (Paynter 2002: 216)

This resonates with what Ball (inter alia Ball 2003; Ball 2012) has referred to as performativity, where the teacher is 'controlled' by and in what they do:

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> The performances [in the non-musical sense] (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.
>
> (Ball 2003: 216)

What this means for music teachers in England is that in some instances it has become the case that classroom work has taken centre stage in terms of *only* the grades and marks which are produced. When this is allied to the ways in which creativity is taught and learned in music classrooms then problems can ensue. We have considered a range of theoretical approaches in order to understanding creativity in this chapter, but one thing that these stances have in common is that they were not intended to be the starting-point for a grading exercise. The assessment of creativity has a troubled history. In school music classrooms this finds its outworking in the ways in which school music teachers assess performing and composing, with the latter particularly being the source of much contestation. Paynter's observation about assessments that "…[make] important what can most easily be evaluated rather than valuing what is important" (ibid) is hugely significant here. One of the reasons for this happening being, sadly, in many cases, the demands of performativity.

Musical assessment

But what would a *musical* system of assessment be like in school music classrooms if the performativity regime were to somehow be spirited away, and music teachers permitted freedoms to do as they please? Mary James gives us some questions to use as a starting point for this consideration:

> …is learning about content or processes or outcomes? Is it a property of an individual or is it essentially social? Is learning equivalent to memorisation made manifest through consistent performance? Does it involve the application of knowledge (declarative and procedural) to solve novel problems? Is new knowledge-generation a form of learning? Is it about appropriate and creative use of resources towards a possible range of valued outcomes, retrospectively evaluated rather than pre-specified? Is it purely cognitive or does it have haptic, affective and conative dimensions involving the development of practice, values and the will to act (motivation and effort)? Or is it all these things, with varied emphases according to context?

Music teachers have long had to struggle with learning-doing dichotomies (Fautley, 2010 : 94), and with what has come to be known as the skills-knowledge debate in education (Bourn 2018: 40). But to rethink assessment also involves rethinking what it means to make progress *in music*; and this is important in the school classroom situation, as making progress in music is unlikely to look (or sound!) anything like what making progress in the STEM subjects might entail. However it is these conceptions or progression that often tend to dominate curriculum thinking. Paynter recognized this issue, making the point that systems of progress measurement designed for some school subjects might not be appropriate for music:

> We accept without question that a school curriculum must show progression, not only in the programme overall but also in the content of each subject. In reality, however, things may not be that simple. In the first place, there are different kinds of progression and what would be a reasonable expectation in one area may not be so in another.

> (Paynter 2000: 5)

To be making progress *musically* means that musical progress should be assessed in terms of its musicality. This may not, as Paynter observed in the quote from earlier, mean only 'making important what can most easily be evaluated'. It also means that we need to consider what music actually is, in all its various forms, styles, and genres. This involves recognising

> …the values of complexity, originality and breadth are not necessarily shared by all music's and could prejudice the assessment of some types of musical achievement if summatively applied…

> (Philpott 2012: 156)

Just as the assessment processes for some subjects e.g. science or maths, might not be inappropriate for music, so within music itself a 'one size fits all' assessment schedule might not suit grime, dubstep, string quartets, and classical sitar music. This need unpicking. Paynter's work is concerned with making music, and so if we want children and young people to make progress in this we need to know what it entails. In other words, as Hickman, writing about art and design education puts it:

> …evaluative feedback is necessary, so that students know how well they are doing, but this needs to be negotiated. If criteria are considered to be necessary…the community decides on criteria for assessment, but we need to determine the size of the community; I

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would advocate that the learner's own criteria be used, which means that the community is a minimum of two people…

(Hickman 2007: 84)

For music education this means we need to move away from the linear and predetermined 'start here and go where I order you' assessments that have characterised practice in many schools, and become a more negotiated and personalised learning journey. What is interesting to note about this, is that for many music teachers this will be welcomed, as moving away from evidentiary requirements of a non-music assessment regime means that the musical journeys of all the learners in the classroom can become equally valid

What this will look and sound like in practice is that musical exploration can be predicated on Paynter and Aston's view of '…what music is really about; to help them feel its expressive power and enable them to use it to say something'(Paynter and Aston 1970: 23). It does, however, involve a shift in planning away from the way of working at the time of writing. For example, one teacher on a training course for the English National Curriculum, asked, "has the assessment changed", to which the answer was "no", so the teacher said "then I don't need to change my curriculum". This thinking evidences assessment working retrospectively to inform curriculum, known in the literature as assessment *backwash*. Rethinking assessment in classroom music means starting from the music that is being made, and then helping the students get better, using criteria decided by the local community, as indicated above by Hickman above. This may seem like a lot of work, and a big change, but it helps put the *musical* back in music lessons. It also means that *personalisation*, a much-abused educational word, becomes important. What makes *this* teacher (you, perhaps?) with *these* children and young people, in *this* school, *now*, enthusiastic about teaching, and, what musicking are the pupils enthusiastic about? Indeed, one possible start would be to change the intrinsic baggage of the title of the music lesson by altering its status as a word, from 'music' as a noun, to 'music' as a verb, in other words to focus clearly on *making music*. The importance of this in placing the emphasis firmly on activity is to emphasise the unique form of 'knowing' that making music entails.

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Another change that assessment can make is in terms of thinking about progress in ways other than which are normally 'measured' by criteria. In music education these often tend to involve matter such as complexity, difficulty, speed of execution, technical expertise, and many other features. . But for classroom pupils what about progress in '*care for'* music? (Van der Schyff et al., 2016). Are the pupils taking increasing care over and with their musicking? This is progress, as yet seldom assessed by standardised tests. Are learners becoming concerned with details, 'taking care' with their musical contributions? This involves a different way of thinking about assessment and

progression than is entailed by the often externally imposed view that has been the norm for many years.

Another change that assessment can make to teaching and learning is that of moving away from focussing on measuring content acquisition, or of grading how much the learner has taken in of what the teacher knows. This is like having musical content learning readily assembled in previously determined receptacles, like buckets. The teacher knows that in this seven-week unit on, say, minimalism, there are seven buckets' worth of content which need to be delivered by the teacher and learnt by the class; the place and role of assessment is to determine how much of the bucket contents the class have memorised. This places assessment as a relatively simple task of input – output relations, where remembered content can be tested for, and this grading can then normally be assumed to operate as a generalisation for how well the learners have grasped the topic, in this case minimalism. But with a change towards assessing musical progress musically, then children and young people do not need to simply regurgitate facts *about* music; after all, as Paynter himself noted, "Education should be more than a series of specialist boxes filled with things to be memorised…" (Paynter 1970: 3). What this entails is that changing to this way of working would mean that musicality should be inherent in the music produced. Might this be a problem? Yes, if as noted above this is tested for and measured in ways designed originally for a different school curriculum area. Therefore, what could such assessment look like in music?

Inventing a rating scale for, say, 'taking care of music' will not in itself solve the issue of accountability-driven assessment, which can be so inimical to musical music education. This highlights a key issue. The reporting of a grade should be the end point of an assessment, its terminus, not the starting point, especially bearing in mind Paynter's dictums above. So *reporting* assessment should only be arrived at *after* any assessment has been made. The outworking of this is that if a music scheme of work is predicated upon, say, taking care, then there will be little if any backwash, the reporting of assessment should arise from the work done. One way to do something about this in a sensible, and, importantly, *musical* fashion, is to go back to thinking about what *proper* formative assessment of musicking entails.

Formative assessment has been written about for many years, and is the subject of many professional development courses, and figures significantly in many pre-service teacher education and training programmes too. But *proper* formative assessment has, in a number of instances, been derailed by whole-school assessment policies which have misunderstood its essential reactive and dynamic nature. As Booth notes:

> What is crucial to know is that formative assessment is a process and involves working with students so that learners know where they are in

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their learning, where they need to be, and how they are going to get there. In short, formative assessment normally involves a dialogue (whether oral or written) which moves teaching and learning forward... The nature of formative assessment does not include marks, levels or grades, nor does it compare students with one another. Instead, it focuses on what the next steps are on an individual and personal level. The key component of formative assessment, though, is not just the collection of information, but that it is actively used and acted upon by the teacher to improve future teaching, and the student to improve future learning.

(Booth 2017: 27)

Booth's description here is key. Music teachers have long been used to doing proper formative assessment, indeed, the whole history of musical teaching and learning involves dialogic formative assessment. What this means is that as a profession, formative assessment is known, used, and understood. What would help significantly with taking forwards the formative assessment of creativity in music lessons would be a focussed, and importantly, legitimated return to this natural strength of music educators. Music teachers need permission from the curriculum 'heavyweights' in order to put this into practice in their own contexts.

We have seen earlier in this chapter how classroom music teachers have sometimes been placed in difficult situations, in order to try to make their inherently musical ideals fit with system-wide assessment formats that sit uneasily with music education. As Paynter observed:

…there is pressure upon teachers to produce verifiable evidence of progress. If, to do that, it becomes necessary to compromise by making important whatever is easiest to assess/evaluate rather than assessing/evaluating those things which are truly important to a subject, then students' achievements may be trivialised.

(Paynter 2000: 5)

These sentiments still hold true today. In devising assessments for use with their learners, teachers can be drawn into the compromise Paynter describes, and in doing so, lose touch with the very essence of musicality, and of being musical, and that is one of the most powerful draws of this subject. To be true to the learners, and to be properly musical, requires us all to rethink what it is that we think is musically important, and *why* we think this is the case. From this we then need to move to a consideration of what it is we want our students to be able to do, and then to be able to construct a curriculum for our pupils, in our contexts, so as to delineate in what sequence this is best achieved.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways in which giving value to musical creativity can be considered in today's music classrooms. It has returned to the writings of John Paynter, and placed these into a contemporary framework of global accountability and performativity. It has suggested that even against this uncomfortable background, creativity and music making is as relevant to the lives of young people today as it ever has been, and that to accommodate these issues, music educators need to find ways of rethinking about both what they do, and, importantly, what they value. This is no easy task, and there will be opposition to simplistic formulations of music education by some for whom the messy complexities of this will be too much to bear. But just as John Paynter had to deal with criticism and naysayers in the twentieth century, so will those music educators working to better things for their learners in this century. The path of progression can be slow, but we owe it to our learners to try and follow it!

We can be sure that John Paynter would be thinking, writing, and pushing our thoughts onwards in these directions.

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