

What do we know in music education?

Knowledge in music education is a highly complex and problematic area in music education. In this editorial we are focussing on some aspects of this issue, particularly as viewed through the very particular lens of coverage in the pages of this journal.

Back in 1982 a former editor of the *British Journal of Music Education* was grappling with this issue, and produced a short list of knowledge types for music education that still seem to work well today:

- Know how to: ...spell a word...to manipulate a musical instrument
- Knowing that:...2+7=9...Beethoven wrote nine symphonies
- Knowing by acquaintance – knowing him/her/it... a painting...specific knowledge of a musical work
- Knowing what's what:...what we like...what we value (Swanwick & Taylor, 1982 p.7)

Moving to a more recent publication, in his BJME review of Graham McPhail's (2022) book "Knowledge and Music Education", Ian Axtell noted that McPhail distinguished between:

"two types of knowledge – epistemic knowledge (from the disciplines) and sociocultural knowledge (from everyday life)" and "two key knowledge forms within epistemic knowledge: knowledge-that (knowledge of something) and know-how-to (knowing how to do something with that knowledge of something)" (Axtell, 2023 p408; citing McPhail (ibid) p28).

Previously in the *BJME*, McPhail had noted that:

...consideration of ... epistemological aspects of differentiation of knowledge forms is largely absent from discussion in the music education literature which tends to focus on pedagogy (McPhail, 2016 p.44).

Taking this as a cue, thinking about epistemological aspects is worthy of further, and more detailed consideration. What we can state already is that notions of knowledge in music education, then, are clearly both complex and problematic. So why is this matter worthy of discussion here in a BJME editorial? It has been addressed before on a number of occasions (inter alia Fautley & Murphy 2015; 2016; Fautley & Daubney, 2019), however, it has reappeared, in England at least, as an issue to the fore of thinking in education broadly, and particularly in music education, most notably in some aspects of recent music education policy. A number of these aspects have been covered recently in the pages of the BJME in some detail, including, but not restricted to, Whittaker (2021) and Leveridge (2022). Susan Young, in her 2023 BJME article makes this pertinent point:

...the relationships between ideology, knowledge and power representing the interests of particular social groups and the linked interests of commercially

orientated music education individuals, organisations and institutions (Young, 2023 p.148).

And it is this which is worthy of consideration by both a local and an international readership. It begs the question 'what knowledge do we want our children and young people to have?' Even asking such a question in this fashion raises yet another problematic matter - is knowledge a possession? Anna Sfard (1998) described two metaphors for learning, what she called the *acquisition metaphor* and the *participation metaphor*. In the acquisition metaphor, learning is viewed as a possession:

This approach, which today seems natural and self-evident, brings to mind the activity of accumulating material goods. The language...makes us think about the human mind as a container to be filled with certain materials and about the learner as becoming the owner of these materials (Sfard, 1998 p.5).

By way of contrast, however, in the participation metaphor:

...learning a subject is now conceived of as a process of becoming a member of a certain community. This entails, above all, the ability to communicate in the language of the community and act according to its particular norms. (Ibid, p.6).

In other words, what takes place in participation is that '... the permanence of having gives way to the constant flux of doing' (ibid, p.6). And one thing we do know is that a lot of 'doing' takes place in music education!

Sfard's two ways of viewing knowledge have significance for us in music education, for example in some contexts participation in a musical activity is seen as being in and of itself sufficient (Nenadic, 2023), whereas in others, such as in England's government-mandated *Model Music Curriculum* (DfE, 2021) knowledge is configured as curriculum content, and delineated in a progressive and acquisitional fashion, although with participatory elements too.

Epistemologically speaking, there is a need for 'knowing' to be considered separately from what Sfard might call knowledge-as-product, a point recognised by von Glasersfeld when he observed that words alone may not be sufficient to contain knowledge, and that:

...once we come to see this essential and inescapable subjectivity of linguistic meaning, we can no longer maintain the preconceived notion that words convey ideas or knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1989 p.133).

This idea of von Glasersfeld was cited by Major and Cottle here in the BJME, where they noted that:

Glasersfeld (1989) called this 'viable knowledge', to describe learning where understandings are explored through practical activities.

In music education we have no issues with thinking about pedagogies which explore ideas through the practical medium of creating and making music. However, one of the many implications of this for music education is that we need to distinguish between 'knowing' and 'knowledge'. Knowing and knowledge are not the same thing, and therefore what students are knowing is not necessarily a simple matter, and it can be the case when teaching and learning music, as Carroll (2021 p.205) noted, "this required that students translate their 'knowing' into 'knowledge'". When we add to this already complex mix the notion that children and young people come to school with a great deal of knowledge and knowing about music education already, and that some of this may well be tacit, we are taken into realm of Polanyi's maxim, as cited in BJME by Swanwick back in 1990:

...beautifully and simply expressed by the scientist/ philosopher, Polanyi, in his pregnant phrase, 'we can know more than we can tell'. Much if not most knowledge is indeed tacit: we do know more than we can tell... (Swanwick, 1990, p.217)

But what can we do about this? For us as music educators and researchers we are keen as a community to be taking learning forwards, and contributing to thinking about doing this in children and young people. This brings to mind one of the classic, much-cited pieces of educational research literature (Cobb, 1999), where it was asked "whether development is cognitive self-organization or enculturation into established practice", which point is in itself food for thought for all of the various aspects under consideration.

Why does all this matter? It matters because when reading, or writing for an international journal we are not in our own private echo-chambers, and we need to both be aware of, and consider that, what in our own silo we might see as unproblematic and straightforward, may well be far from the case in other places, situations, and contexts. There are all sorts of ramifications to this, including political, sociological, cultural, situational, and economic, but as an international community we need to be very aware of the sorts of knowledge we may be promoting, whether wittingly or unwittingly, and maybe what we are guilty of omitting, again whether deliberately or tacitly. This is no easy feat, and whilst we are not always readily able or equipped to think outside of our own experiences, nonetheless these will be very apparent when we read about contexts far from our own, or by others in those other contexts reading about what for us is the quotidian unremarkable experience .

However, and possibly most importantly, we are in a situation wherein neoliberal governments are increasingly keen to intervene and interfere in music education, and do this by creating policy (see Schmidt, 2017; 2020 for a discussion of this in relation to music education), which will then, in many cases, determine "who gets what, when [and] how" (Knill & Tosun, 2020, p.1), and we know that for us in music education we can often be last in the queue for any such distribution!

So, to return to the theme of this editorial, music education involves knowledge and knowing, and this exists in a variety of types. We need to be aware that this is not simple, and that there are those who may wish to control both of these aspects for political reasons, however well-intentioned, and that there can be those who are looking to profit financially from the provision of pre-packaged knowledge units which

they can sell. As a community we need to be aware that knowledge is unlikely to be innocent, and that we need to be always on our guard, and asking questions concerning whose knowledge, and why.

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