

## Music Teachers and Curriculum Chess

These days I can only seem to do one thing at once. Perhaps it's my age, perhaps it's lack of post-it notes, or perhaps it's simply that I'm too busy over-thinking everything. But it's very different for the classroom Music teacher. The Music teacher is often a simultaneous technician, musician, tactician and more.

It's not unusual for classroom Music teachers to teach, assess, record, rehearse, perform, compose, arrange, direct and facilitate music all within the bounds of a single lesson. Now add to these activities the standard teaching fare of duties, parental correspondence, and school meetings. Finally season with a liberal dose of rehearsals, music interventions, concerts and events. Voilà! You have what is probably just a canapé of the average music teacher meal.

And yet there is something more. Music teachers are also curriculum designers. They plan lessons, they create schemes of work and they design Programmes of Study across Key Stages. This is not easy. It involves conceptualising, retaining and arranging potential learning pathways and combining these into a cohesive whole. You might remember Mr Spock on Star Trek playing three-dimensional chess. Curriculum design is a lot like this, but a bit more difficult.

The sheer effort required to design music curricula is infrequently discussed, but it should be. Music teachers are curriculum couturiers, designing learning clothing tailored for the specific needs of the young people with whom they are working. They are the curriculum architects, designing the structure within which musical learning is experienced in their schools. Add to this the complex nature of musical learning with its multidimensional relationships, modes of communication and expressive characteristics and the level of demands placed upon music teachers is considerable.

The complexity of curriculum as an entity should therefore come as no surprise. We've known for some time that it is a demanding domain. Bernstein (1971) describes it as one of three message systems (pedagogy and evaluation are the others) within which curriculum "defines what counts as valid knowledge" (1971, p. 47). Such dimensions are important, not least because policy-makers can use curriculum structures to define what knowledge is and what it isn't (Maw, 1993; Espeland, 1999; Cox, 2011). Bruner explored some of these complexities when he suggested that curriculum is a three-way conversation between learner, expert, and defined bodies of knowledge existing within cultures (1991). There isn't room here to even begin to explore this adequately, but let's just say that culturally defined knowledge offers some significant challenges, especially when we begin to consider that the cultures of schools can be hugely disparate, never mind wider cultural settings.

Curriculum in music is even more intertwined. Elliot (1986) proposed that *the* curriculum is actually several curricula in synchronous operation and when you think about it, what teachers are trying to achieve in music certainly reaches far beyond the walls of the classroom (Anderson, 2012). Perhaps it isn't that surprising that there is potential for multiple curriculum strands being woven together. Discussion of music curriculum since Elliot has continued to explore intricate ideas. Spruce (2012) outlines curriculum as negotiation between knowledge and pedagogy, and Cooke & Spruce (2016) further contend it is a "dynamic phenomenon" (2016, p. 79). In the context of pedagogy, Cain & Cursley (2017) suggest that it is not an object to be 'delivered' to young people; whatever else curriculum is, it is not a package, which if no-one is in, is left on the doorstep. Curriculum is a living and dynamic entity which becomes visible, and audible, in the musical interactions between teachers and young people in the classroom.

We do not yet know enough about how classroom music teachers approach these complex issues. In seeking to build on my earlier research into Key Stage 3 Music curricula and how teachers plan these (Anderson, 2019), I am currently engaged in a research study which looks at recent teacher approaches to Key Stage 3 music curricula design. At the time of writing, some aspects of the research are still to be conducted, and yet emerging findings demonstrate some clear trends. At this early stage of analysis, the study shows a continued topic led approach, in which the Blues is taught to Year 8 in 80% of schools, and in which over 90% of teachers begin their Key Stage 3 programmes with Musical Elements (also known as the inter-related dimensions of music) in year 7. School structures are having an increasing impact on teacher choices, with over 30% of schools reporting a two instead of three-year Key Stage 3, which participants report has impacted music curriculum development and negatively affected Key Stage 4 Music progression. Whilst many teachers reported that the effect of the Covid pandemic had the most significant impact on their curriculum this year, many did not. Other significant inhibiting factors which the teachers identified included: leadership, engagement, resourcing, Ofsted curriculum framing of intent, implementation and impact (Ofsted, 2019), as well as large class sizes. Curriculum is therefore not clear-cut yet, not matter how challenging our times. Look out for more details about the findings of this research when the report on *Curriculum Models in School Practices* is published later this year.

Curriculum continues to matter. More than that, curriculum continues to constitute the vehicle through which many young people access music in schools, a vehicle which, despite some pre-set parameters, is nevertheless largely designed and maintained by Music teachers. Such a vehicle has the potential to be a “white-van” (Savage, 2013, p. 85), but with Music teachers, I think this is rare. Perhaps music curriculum is a Tesla Roadster meets M3 Amphibious Rig? Stop reading now and look them up. Curriculum is everywhere you know.

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