Developing a framework for the study of teachers' views of creativity in music education

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This is an electronic version of an article published in: Odena, O. (2001) Developing a framework for the study of teachers' views of creativity in music education, *Goldsmiths Journal of Education*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 59-67. ISSN 1369-3794

Abstract: In this paper past and present controversies surrounding the meaning of the term 'creativity' are outlined and different approaches taken by previous studies on creativity are reviewed. In relation to this I suggest a four-fold framework (i.e. pupil-environment-process-product) is used when enquiring into music teachers' views of creativity as they emerge during music activities.

Introduction

Creativity is a complex and vague term. In order to pursue the concept of creativity in music education it is necessary to look at the concept of creativity in itself. The very wide use of the word during the last fifty years in many fields of study, including philosophy, arts, psychology, education and science, has led to confusion and a loss of its meaning. Research in music education however, has shown increasing interest in the field of creativity in recent years (Kratus, 1990; Reimer and Wright, 1992; Webster, 1996; Pitts, 1998 and Odam, 2000). In view of this it seems appropriate to review the meaning that teachers attach to the term 'creativity' in order to understand the interactions between pupils and educators in educational settings which may facilitate such creativity. My intention in this article is to illustrate a practical framework to be used when enquiring into music teachers' views on creativity. In order to do this, I firstly explore past and present controversies surrounding the use of the word creativity in the music education arena and policy documents. Secondly, I review the different approaches taken by previous studies. In the conclusion I suggest a four-fold framework to be considered when enquiring into music educators' thinking.

The controversy over the 'meanings' of creativity.

During the 1970s, proposals for curriculum music activities in which there was an emphasis on the idea of 'creativity' were disseminated in England by the Schools Council, the Department of Education and Science and Local Authorities (Ross, 1975; Paynter, 1982). It seems from a review of the proposals that creativity was referred to in two ways within the documents: one stating the value and desirability of creativity, and

the other describing activities that were seen as fostering the development of creativity. There was, however, little examination of what it was to be creative. There were frequent disagreements amongst music educators and academics about the value and uses of creativity (White, 1968; Elliot, 1971). Plummeridge (1980) identified three main aspects of the debate within music education: the 'meaning' of creativity; the 'context' of the proposals; and the 'practice' or style of teaching. There were many ambiguities surrounding the word 'creativity', and its meaning can only be understood by referring to the actions of the people involved in those activities. Creativity means different things to different people.

Ray Elliot (1971), in his article *Versions of Creativity*, identified two main concepts of creativity, which he called the 'traditional' and the 'new'. The traditional was related to the myth of creation and was firmly implanted in the uses of ordinary language. He noted that this concept did not allow creativity to be attributed to those who brought 'no new thing into being' (Elliot, 1971, p. 139). The traditional concept of creativity stressed the value of the 'products'. In contrast, the new concept was related to the psychological notion of 'imaginative thinking' and claimed that creativity is imagination successfully manifested in any valued pursuit, a thinking style manifested in actions. This idea of creativity as a universal potential is currently suggested in policy documents such as the report *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture & Education* (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education [NACCCE] 1999). Nowadays many educators support the idea of creativity as a normal capability of children:

> 'Creativity means connecting the previously unconnected in ways that are new and meaningful to the individual concerned'. (Duffy, 1998: 18)

To some extent, it can be suggested that the past debate on creativity has informed the formulation of the new National Curriculum for music. Though there has been a shift in terminology, using 'improvisation' and 'composing' instead of the more confusing 'creative work', this debate has been re-emphasised with the production of music guidelines. The word 'creativity' is frequently used in the guidelines but its meaning is not always defined. Examples include documents produced by the Department for Education and Employment and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (DFEE & QCA). It is argued in the *National Curriculum. Handbook for secondary teachers in England* (DFEE & QCA, 1999a, p. 172) that the teaching of music 'increases self-discipline and *creativity*' (emphasis mine). Again, one of the strands of the Programmes of Study is 'creating and developing musical ideas' within all key stages:

> '*Creating* and developing musical ideas – *composing* skills (Key Stage 3, age 11-14)
> Pupils should be taught how to:
> a) *improvise*, exploring and developing musical ideas when performing
> b) *produce*, develop and extend musical ideas, selecting and combining resources within musical structures and given genres, styles and traditions' (DFEE & QCA, 1999a, p. 172, emphasis added).

Furthermore, the booklet *Music. The National Curriculum for England* (DFEE & QCA, 1999b) states specific ways in which the teaching of music contributes to learning skills across the curriculum. It is argued that:

> 'Music provides opportunities to promote:
> *thinking skills*, through analysis and evaluation of music, adopting and developing musical ideas and working *creatively*, reflectively and spontaneously.' (DFEE & QCA, 1999b, p. 9, emphasis added)

Attainment targets are stated in the National Curriculum. An attainment target, as defined by the Education Act 1996 section 353a, sets out the 'knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage'. Attainment targets contain eight level descriptors of increasing difficulty, each level describing 'the types and range of performance that pupils working at that level should characteristically demonstrate' (DFEE & QCA, 1999b, p. 36). The latest version of the English National Curriculum includes the following statement with respect to the attainment target for music at level 5 (Key Stage 3):

> 'Pupils...*improvise* melodic and rhythmic material within given structures, use a variety of notations and *compose* music for different occasions using appropriate musical devices such as melody, rhythms, chords and structures...They evaluate how venue, occasion and purpose affects the way music is *created*, performed and heard.' (DFEE & QCA, 1999b, p. 37, emphasis added)

It is apparent from these quotations that creativity is referred to in two ways within the official documents: (a) describing activities under the label of creativity such as improvisation and composition (e.g. DFEE & QCA, 1999a, p. 172) and (b) stating the value of creativity as a desirable 'thinking style' (e.g. DFEE & QCA, 1999b, p. 9). But again, there is little examination of what it is to be creative.

The inclusion of improvisation in musical creativity, for example in the attainment targets of the National Curriculum, is something that causes anxiety for many teachers who fear their own inadequate grounding in this area. Gibbs (1994) argued that what frustrates teachers in developing their own skills and those of their students is a pervasive belief that improvisation can not really be taught. Regarding the teaching of composition, it seems that there is no agreement on teaching methods and curriculum balance. George Odam (2000) carried out a study aimed at identifying a basis for effective composition practice in the classroom, observing experienced teachers and their pupils in twenty-six state secondary schools across England. He concluded that group-work was the dominant working method in most schools. He also suggested that much time was wasted in group-work and that this contributed to stress in both teachers and pupils. In his opinion, too many music educators use methods inappropriate to their available resources. Composing is an individual activity, argues Odam, and this is not acknowledged in the National Curriculum.

Therefore, issues surrounding creativity, its meanings, and their interpretation, remain unresolved because they are not harmonised by centralised policy production (Gibbs, 1994; Òdena Caballol, 1999; Odam, 2000). Recent research on educators' views of creativity has noted that teachers of arts subjects interpret creativity and their teaching in personal terms (Fryer & Collings, 1991a, 1991b). Fryer (1996) also pointed to a need for further inquiry into the factors related to variations in teachers' perceptions of creativity.

Different approaches to the study of creativity.

Depending on the field (i.e. aesthetics, philosophy, musicology, psychology or education) several approaches to the study of creativity have been taken over the last few decades. A detailed review of the literature suggests four ways of approaching this research, focussing on (1) the characteristics of the creative *person*, (2) the description of an appropriate *environment* for developing creativity, (3) the study of the creative *process*, and (4) the definition of the creative *product*. These are outlined below.

Regarding the personality traits of creative people, psychological research carried out over the last fifty years has characterised the creative *person* as an intelligent individual capable of sustaining hard work, seeking change and adventure, impulsive, non-conformist and inclined to avoid restrictive schedules (Jones, 1984; Cropley, 1992). Moreover, there was a shift of meanings with the spreading of Elliot's (1971) new concept of creativity. As noted above, within this concept, creativity is viewed as imaginative thinking or the process of having novel ideas and making something of them, and that contemporary educators seem to agree that creativity should be seen as a universal potential. In spite of this, there has been a lack of research specifically addressing music teachers' views of creativity. A few studies have explored the views of generalist teachers in an indirect way, such as through measuring attitudes before and after creativity workshops (Treffinger et al, 1968; Craft, 1998). Other research has focussed upon educators' views of the personality characteristics typical of creative pupils (e.g., Torrance, 1963, 1965, 1975). There is a limitation that applies to some of these studies. They seek to find out the degree to which educators would agree or disagree with the researchers' theories. For example, the five-point scale developed by Treffinger et al. (1968) presented the researcher's assumptions embedded in some of their items. More recently, Runco et al. (1993) avoided this limitation using social validation research techniques, where the instruments (e.g., questionnaires and themes for interviews) are developed from ideas gathered from significant individuals. Runco et al. (1993) developed their tests drawing on the educators' implicit theories. The results described - rather than explained - the personality of creative pupils with a list of adjectives, including 'adventurous', 'artistic', 'curious' and 'imaginative'.

Regarding the *environment* for creativity, Webster (1996, p. 92) defined it as the host of characteristics that establish 'the creator's working conditions and contribute to the

creative process'. Some of these characteristics are the financial support and family conditions, as well as societal expectations, peer pressure and the availability of resources. Fryer (1996) considered the physical as well as the motivational environment. She said that to support creativity, students might need a personal space in which to work individually, away from the group, until they feel comfortable to share their new ideas with others. She suggested that group activities may not necessarily be conducive to creative work. What is important is to give students space to think. She noted that as well as a good physical environment, individuals need intrinsic motivation to become creative. Amabile (1983) identified intrinsic motivation as a key factor in creative performance. The activities and the learning interests of the students may engender this motivation. This is what Beetlestone (1998) called 'intellectual climate'. It may be suggested, then, from the literature that an important point for developing creative processes is the availability of a good environment, including a physical climate (resources, space to work individually) and an intellectual climate (intrinsic motivation).

Some researchers have tried to describe the creative *process* through examining the various stages which the individual goes through. A widely accepted seminal theory by Wallas (1926) illustrated four different stages in the formation of an individual's new thought: preparation (the problem is investigated in all directions); incubation (the individual does not consciously think about the problem); illumination (the appearance of the 'happy idea'); and verification. Even though studies of music teachers' views on the process of creation are almost non-existent, some research has been done about the creation process of composers and music students (Bennett, 1975, 1976; De Souza Fleith et al., 2000). Bennett (1975, 1976) studied the creative processes of professional composers of classical music and proposed an 'improvisational approach' for helping pupils learn to compose. The fact that the majority of studies on composition have been focused on professional musicians leaves several questions unanswered. The first, as Kennedy (1999) pointed out, is whether the creation processes of trained composers are the same as those of music students. The second question, studied by Brinkman (1999), is whether all music students follow similar procedures when presented with musical problems concerned with improvisation and composition. The remaining issue for music teachers is how to organise an activity when one of its aims is the encouragement of all pupils' creativity.

Regarding the evaluation of the *product*, there are writers who seek to identify creativity in terms of the qualities or characteristics of what is made. Amongst others, some philosophers and aestheticians follow this approach, with the main aim of recognising aesthetic qualities in an individual's product that are thought to indicate creativity. They accept the idea of an objectively identifiable aesthetic value. If a product can be shown to have this value then its maker is creative - the product embodies the person's creativity. Some authors, however, have raised questions on the objectivity of aesthetic appreciation. Hamilyn (1972) suggested that objectivity should not be equated with

truth, because it indicates a certain approach to the truth; objectivity would be a question of inter-subjective agreement. Therefore, those involved in the evaluation of creative products need to identify the criteria they are using. Fryer (1996) carried out a comprehensive study of over a thousand British educators and described the preferred teachers' criteria for judging the creativity of their pupils' products as 'imaginative' and 'original' for the individual.

A four-fold framework for the study of music teachers' views of creativity

During recent decades, quantitative studies have provided a good description of the personality traits of creative children, and generalist teachers' attitudes towards creativity (Runco et al., 1993; Fryer, 1996). These studies, nonetheless, were characterised by short explanations, if any, when discussing music education issues, providing a superficial understanding of what goes on in music educational settings. In addition, they focussed upon one or two aspects of creativity at any one time, leaving other relevant issues out of the enquiry. It appears that what is now needed is research on creativity focusing upon music education, in particular, research aimed to understand the nature and determining factors of the interactions of music students with their teachers during activities involving creative processes. It has been pointed out (Burnard, 2000) that music teachers have their own views of creativity and these views could influence the pedagogic approach and assessment of such activities. While focussing on the teachers' point of view, any enquiry should aim to broaden previous approaches to the study of creativity, examining all four aspects of the field that have been identified in the previous section.

There is clearly a need to look at the whole situation in which creativity may emerge within music activities: Which *pupils* does the teacher regard as creative? What are their characteristics and attitudes? How is the appropriate *environment* for developing creativity considered by the educator, including classroom settings, teaching methods, music programme and school culture? How does the teacher describe the creative *process* of her or his students? How is the evaluation of the students' *product* carried out? What criteria are used in such evaluation? Such questions, of course, resonate with the research approaches identified in the previous section and in turn suggest the need for a more widely encompassing four-fold framework which takes account of *pupils*, *environment*, *process* and *product* in creativity. Focusing classroom observation upon activities involving composition and/or improvisation could facilitate the emergence of teachers' views of creativity – the assumption being that the four-fold framework could be more easily observed during these kinds of activities, even though subsequent work may reveal otherwise.

Summary

As I noted in the introduction, creativity is a widely used term. As a result it tends to be ill-defined and can mean different things to different people. In music education there has been a shift in terminology, using, for example, 'improvisation' and 'composing' instead of the more confusing 'creative work'. However, the word 'creativity' is used in music guidelines and its meaning may not always be clear (DFEE & QCA, 1999a, 1999b) and I have argued that it seems necessary to review the meaning that teachers attach to the term 'creativity'.

The purpose in this paper has been to outline a framework which can be used as a basis for further empirical study into music teachers' views of creativity. The concept of creativity is extremely complex and it has been suggested that, in order to understand the interactions between the teacher and pupils in educational settings involving creative processes, it is necessary to consider the teacher's view of creativity. I would suggest that research outcomes from such an enquiry are likely to be relevant to the improvement of the process of teacher training and curriculum development in music education. Previous studies on creativity focused separately on the four areas examined above; I suggest that if the aim of the study of music teachers' views of creativity is set up in such a way as to allow a broader understanding of attitudes towards creativity as they emerge during music activities, then a four-fold framework comprising pupil-environment-process-product aspects is needed.

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This paper is based on a presentation given at the Doctoral School Summer Conference of the Institute of Education, University of London (1 July 2000), under the title 'A framework for the study of creativity in music education'.

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