

## **The construction of creativity: using video to explore secondary school music teachers' views.**

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### **Contextualisation**

This paper brings together two different areas of research: teachers' thinking and creativity in music education. The former, initially rooted in Psychology and related fields, rapidly developed over the last fifty years following the emergence of various paradigms within the social sciences. The latter – creativity in music education - has a long tradition in the English educational arena. During the 1970s proposals for music activities emphasising the idea of 'creativity' were common in schools. However disagreements arose over the meanings of the term 'creativity' and the proposals for practice. The production of state music curricula in England in recent years has reopened the issue of creativity and its interpretation; nowadays teachers are expected to teach pupils how to create and develop musical ideas. The word creativity is frequently used in policy documents and its meaning is not always defined. In addition, teachers have their own views of creativity and these views somehow influence the pedagogic approach and assessment of such activities.

Previous studies tried to elucidate the general educators' views of creativity by focussing on their perceptions of creative pupils, while ignoring the process of creativity. Other scholars analysed the process of creativity of various individuals and the environment in which this seemed to occur, though avoiding the issue of what was to be considered as a 'creative product'. In this paper the author intends to illustrate a methodology for building up an inclusive description of the music teachers' views of creativity, an area currently little researched.

**Abstract:** *This paper is taken from research which seeks to illustrate how English secondary school music teachers view creativity. It explores methodological issues regarding the eliciting of the views of teachers regarding creativity, with particular reference to the use of videotaped extracts of lessons during in-depth semi-*

*structured interviews. Various research designs and results from previous studies are examined and the implications pointed out. A pilot study using a theoretical four-fold framework (pupil-environment-process-product) is reported. A qualitative research design was used to allow teachers to reflect on their own ideas. Music lessons on composition and improvisation from three schools were observed and videotaped. The teachers were interviewed and asked to complete a 'Musical Career Path'. The process of analysis was assisted by a software package for qualitative research (i.e. NUDIST). The conclusions presented some subcategories that supported the initial framework and exemplified the complexities in defining the term 'creativity', pointing to a need for further enquiry. It is suggested that the use of videotaped extracts of lessons for the purpose of discussion with participants during the interviews, proved beneficial in exploring the teachers' views of creativity. This method may have relevance for both researchers and practitioners interested in teachers' attitudes.*

## **Introduction**

Creativity is an ambiguous term. The overuse of the word in everyday life and in many academic fields (e.g. arts, philosophy and science) has led to a loss in its meaning. It may be suggested that in music education, creativity is an umbrella term including composition and improvisation, though the term could be applied to listening (i.e. creative listening), performance (i.e. creative performance) and almost all music curriculum activities. During the 1970s proposals for music curriculum activities emphasising the idea of 'creative work' were popular in English secondary schools (Paynter, 1982). Disagreements did however arise surrounding the uses of creativity because of the ambiguities in its meaning and the discrepancies about the theories informing the new proposals for practice (White, 1968; Swanwick, 1974 and Plummeridge, 1980).

Two different concepts of creativity (i.e. the 'traditional' and the 'new') were identified (Elliot, 1971). The traditional, as described by Elliot (1971), is ascribed to people who contribute significantly to a field and whose contributions are recognised by the community. It has a limited significance in the school context. This concept, implanted in the uses of ordinary language, is related to the myth of creation and does not allow creativity to be attributed to those who bring 'no new thing into being' (Elliot, 1971, p. 139). Other authors have called it 'historical creativity' (Boden, 1990) and 'historic originality' (NACCCE, 1999). In contrast, the new concept is related to the psychological notion of 'imaginative thinking' and has broad applications in the school context. Within this concept, creativity

is imagination successfully manifested in any valued pursuit. This psychological concept of creativity has also been called 'little c' creativity (Craft, 2000). Confusion arises when accounts of the new concept are presented as if they were characterisations of the traditional one.

The centralised production of music curricula in England in recent years has unified the knowledge that pupils are expected to gain by the end of their schooling. Issues concerning creativity and its interpretation remain nonetheless because they are not resolved by the centralised production of policy (Gibbs, 1994; Odena Caballol, 1999; Odam, 2000). In the most recent edition of the English National Curriculum for Music, for example, the word creativity is used in two different ways:

- a. stating the value of creativity as a desirable 'thinking style';

Music provides opportunities to promote:

- thinking skills, through analysis and evaluation of music, adopting and developing musical ideas and working creatively, reflectively and spontaneously [emphasis mine].  
(Department for Education and Employment and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (DfEE and QCA), 1999a, p. 9)

- b. Including activities such as improvisation and composition under the rubric of 'creativity':

Creating and developing musical ideas – composing skills [Key stage 3, age 11-14]

Pupils should be taught how to:

- improvise, exploring and developing musical ideas when performing;
- produce, develop and extend musical ideas, selecting and combining resources within musical structures and given genres, styles and traditions [emphasis mine].  
(DfEE and QCA, 1999b, p. 172)

Recent studies on educators' views of creativity have indicated that teachers of arts subjects interpret creativity and their teaching in personal terms (Fryer and Collings, 1991a, 1991b). Fryer (1996) carried out a comprehensive study involving 1028 educators from a range of subjects and levels, and pointed out the need for further research into the factors associated with the teachers' different perceptions of creativity.

In music education research, increasing interest has been displayed in the study of creativity, including studies concerned with composition and improvisation (Kennedy, 1999; Brinkman, 1999; Burnard, 2000a, 2000b; De Souza Fleith, Militao, Alves and Siqueira, 2000). In these studies, music students and professional musicians have reflected on their processes of composition and improvisation. It has been suggested, however, that there is a lack of studies into the views of music educators (Odena, 2001a). Teachers have their own views of creativity and these views have an influence on their pedagogic approach and assessment of activities involving the creative process. The intention in this paper is to consider a practical framework and methodology for exploring music teachers' perceptions of creativity.

### **A theoretical four-fold framework for researching teachers' thinking on creativity**

A detailed review of the educational literature suggests four ways to approach the study of creativity: the personality traits of creative pupils (Torrance, 1963, 1975; Cropley, 1992; Runco, Johnson and Bear, 1993); the appropriate environment for developing creativity (Amabile, 1983; Fryer, 1996; Beetlestone, 1998); the creative process (Bennett, 1975, 1976); the definition of the creative product (Hamilyn, 1972; Fryer and Collings, 1991a).

Regarding the personality traits, by and large creative pupils have been described as active, capable, curious, enthusiastic, imaginative, capable of sustaining hard work, non-conformist and inclined to avoid restrictive schedules (Cropley, 1992; Runco et al., 1993). Regarding the environment for creativity, it was suggested (Odena, 2000) that an important point for developing creative processes is the availability of a 'good' environment, including resources and space to work individually (i.e. physical climate). Amabile (1983) also pointed out that intrinsic motivation is a key factor for creative performance. This intrinsic

motivation is what Beetlestone (1998) called 'intellectual climate'. The activities and the learning interests of the students may engender this motivation.

Regarding the definition of the creative product, Fryer (1996) described the preferred criteria of the teachers in her sample for judging the pupils' creativity as 'original for the pupil' and 'imaginative'. These studies nevertheless, were characterised by short explanations when discussing music education issues, providing a superficial understanding of what goes on in music educational settings. In addition, previous studies analysed the process of creativity of various individuals (e.g. professionals, artists, students) and the environment in which this seemed to occur, while avoiding the issue of what was to be considered as a 'creative product'. Other authors tried to elucidate the general educators' views of creativity by focussing on their perceptions of creative pupils and the pupils' work, while ignoring the process of creativity. It may well seem then, that the enquiry on music teachers' views of creativity would benefit by broadening the approach of previous studies and examining all four fields: pupil – environment - process - product (Odena, 2001b). These themes for enquiry are however abstract constructs drawn from the literature and they lack the clarity of everyday language. If we were to ask teachers about these four fields we may well be at risk of imposing our theoretical constructs on their personal views. The issue then is how to make the teachers' own views clear.

### **How to make teachers' views explicit? Some considerations of research design**

Runco et al. (1993) suggested that some investigations of teachers' views of creativity had some limitations in terms of validity. They argued that some of these studies (e.g. Treffinger, Ripple and Dacey, 1968; Torrance, 1963) appeared to be based on explicit theories developed by professional social scientists who formulated tests to question the degree to which educators would agree or disagree with their hypotheses. A second limitation of previous studies that may be suggested is that some of them were carried out during creativity consciousness-raising exercises and creativity workshops. Treffinger et al. (1968) conducted their research during an American in-service programme on creativity. Craft (1998) carried out another study in the UK, during an Open University postgraduate course devised to support teachers' capability in

fostering learner creativity across the curriculum. It may well be suggested that these investigations could be biased towards a positive attitude about creativity.

In order to prevent validity limitations brought about by confronting teachers with descriptions from the literature, the intention in the present enquiry was not to ask participants directly about constructs of theoretical creativity outlined in academic writing. Instead, participants were interviewed presenting in front of them extracts of their own taped classroom music lessons and asked to comment upon them. The taped extracts were the starting point from which teachers explained their views on musical creativity. This enabled an explanation of the participants' views in their own words instead of using the technical-academic concepts from the literature. The intention was, moreover, to explore further the 'why' of their ideas about creativity. This video technique draws upon work by Silvers (1977), who used it in a study of children's culture, and Lennon (1996), who used a similar method in a qualitative study of piano teachers' thinking.

In her influential study, Silvers (1977) used videotaped lessons when interviewing groups of pupils. Her purpose was to examine the interaction between the adult researcher and the pupils during the group interviews. For this reason her procedure involved three consecutive steps. Firstly the recording of a lesson in order to produce a 'first-generation' tape. Secondly, playing this tape shortly afterwards to the children involved, while the researcher engaged them in discussion to explore their understandings. This group interviewing was again videotaped, producing a 'second-generation' tape that included the children watching the 'first-generation' tape and the group interview discussion. Finally, selected sequences of the 'second-generation' tape were edited into a 'third-generation' tape to be analysed by the researcher in a later stage.

In the case reported here and in Lennon's (1996) case, the aim of the enquiry was not to examine the interaction between the researcher and the music educator during the interview, but to study the teacher's own views about what went on during the taped lessons. Because of this, the interviews with teachers were only audio taped, in order to transcribe them afterwards. Thus the video recording process was completed in two steps: first several 'first-generation' tapes were produced videotaping lessons with each participant; and finally some extracts from these tapes were edited into a 'second-generation' tape to be viewed by both teacher and researcher during the interview. The difference

between Lennon's (1996) research and the present study is that she included the selected video extracts in the final report, disclosing the identity of the teachers participating in her study.

### ***Preparing for data collection***

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that in sampling within a qualitative approach, what is important is the potential of each participant to help the researcher to develop theoretical insights into the area of knowledge studied. Because the aim of this study was to cover a range of teachers' views, it was adopted what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call a 'purposive' approach to selecting the participants. Lincoln and Guba note that purposive sampling increases the scope or range of data exposed. Having focussed the study on school music teachers, the intention was to involve participants with different backgrounds, teaching in a variety of contexts from several secondary schools. Initially it was considered that three teachers from different schools would probably provide a broad range of potential views, even though it was recognised that it might be necessary to involve more teachers at a later stage. According to Spradley's (1979) definition of a 'good informant', teachers had to be qualified, experienced and currently involved in teaching.

To facilitate the observation of a wide range of teaching views in each participant, each teacher was video taped over several lessons. A single researcher in a relatively small study could not follow all activities within the music curriculum during the whole academic year. It was necessary to focus on a specific range of activities. It was assumed activities involving music composition and/or improvisation would best facilitate the emergence of teachers' views on creativity. It would seem likely that teachers associate creativity with 'composing' (e.g. Kratus, 1990; Reimer and Wright, 1992; Webster, 1996; Pitts, 1998). While the focus was on this type of activities, the intention was to observe and videotape the whole lesson because of the importance of being aware of and understanding the context.

Some practicalities regarding the dates and times for the interviews and the visits for classroom observation were personally discussed and agreed with each teacher during a preliminary school visit. The intention was to make clear to participants that the aim of the inquiry was completely non-judgemental. The

researcher's position was not that of an inspector aiming to judge the rights and wrongs of music teacher methods, nor did the observer had the knowledge to evaluate them. Instead, it was expected the researcher would play a learning role, trying to collect the views of the participants and building a relationship of trust with them. To this end participants were provided with information about the author's background and experience, the background of the study and the research techniques. It was always explained to prospective participants that classroom observations would be videotaped with the sole purpose of selecting extracts for a later interview where they, then, would comment on their own lessons. It was also noted that names of teachers and schools participating in the study would be changed for confidentiality purposes. As noted in the literature (e.g. Brown and Dowling, 1998) school descriptions are not to be disclosed in detail because it could lead to identifying the participants.

### ***Video taping the classroom observations***

Lincoln and Guba (1985: 235) observe that in successive phases of a study, after determining the focus of the enquiry and the paradigm to use, the researcher involved in a qualitative study should adopt the posture of 'not knowing what is not known' in opposition to the conventional inquirer who usually knows 'what is not known'. The type of observation necessary for this study required the investigator to try to stand back from the situation and adopt a more inquiring approach. This posture was similar to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call 'naturalistic' because of the relevance of any potential issues arising during the research exercise. While the original focus of the observations was on teachers' views on creativity through activities involving music composition and improvisation, the researcher was open to any observations participants wanted to make if they shed light on the aim of the study.

Teachers arranged their classrooms as they wished (i.e. activities, settings, etc.). The intention was to record the whole lesson each time, because of the importance of understanding the activities within the context. The aim was to videotape what was taking place in terms of:

- What **pupils** did the teacher regard as creative?
- What were their characteristics and attitudes?

- How was the appropriate **environment** for developing creativity considered by the teacher, including classroom settings, teaching methods, music programme and school culture?
- How did the teacher consider the creative **process** of their students?
- How was the assessment of creativity in the students' **products** carried out?
- What criteria were used in such evaluation?

The classroom observations, nevertheless, should not be seen as ends in themselves but as a starting point. It is necessary to remember that the focus of the enquiry was on the teachers' own views of creativity; not on the lessons per se but on how participants talked about their lessons. The classroom observation was intended to identify attitudes and behaviours which appeared to frame teachers' views, in order to focus the interview themes and questions.

### ***The interviews: conversations with a purpose***

An examination of the literature on educational research reveals several terms used to describe different types of non-structured interviews. These include 'open ended', 'informant', 'unstructured' and 'non-directive' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Judging from the various levels of freedom given to the participant, the interviews of this study may be characterised as 'semi-structured'. The conversations with teachers were different from one another and were characterised by open-ended questions. Participants were invited to comment on a selection of extracts from their own videotaped lessons. These extracts were selected following the four themes of the theoretical framework previously explained.

The effectiveness of the interviews, thereafter, partially depended on the potential of the extracts to get participants talking about their views of creativity. In addition, teachers had the opportunity to validate the choice and to raise issues that may have been overlooked. A selection of twenty five to thirty minutes of footage was edited for each participant. After each extract the teacher was invited to make comments, elicited by questions such as 'what is your immediate

response to this extract?' or 'would you try to describe what you were doing here?'. Some of the questions focussed around inviting participants to describe each extract and encouraging them to clarify or elaborate issues they had raised. Other questions were stimulated by the teachers' responses or referred to something the teacher had done or said in the extract. The conversation was directed partially by the responses of the teacher, although where appropriate, the researcher tried to introduce questions of a more general nature concerning issues of creativity raised from the four-fold framework.

The aim of these interviews was to concentrate on 'conversations with purpose' as outlined by Burgess (1988). The main purpose was to give a voice to the teachers, to let them reflect on the extracts selected from their teaching in their own words. The intention was to gain some insight into the meanings behind activities and teachers' behaviours, and to investigate the teachers' implicit theories and beliefs about creativity. In particular, the interviewer looked at the explanations by participants of what took place during the lessons with composition and improvisation activities in terms of the creative products, creative pupil characteristics, processes of creation, and environments (including pedagogical strategies involved). The intention was that the interviews would explain the 'why?' of the classroom activities, in reference to the 'what?', 'who?' and 'how?' recorded on video, and would also explain it by means of the teachers' own words.

### ***Interpretation and analysis of data***

The teachers' voice from the transcripts was analysed through the four-fold approach. The aim of this was not to test the framework but to interpret the emerging issues in a consistent way. Presenting videotaped extracts, as described above, facilitated the subsequent coding of data under four broad categories. The researcher was, nevertheless, open to the incorporation of any new theme that emerged from the interviews. The final categories were derived both from the literature and also from the conversations with participants.

References coded under 'pupil' included teachers' comments on creative pupils and descriptions of students' attitudes. Comments on the classroom settings, teaching methods, curriculum and school culture were included under the 'environment' category. The 'process' category included statements about the

different stages in pupils' compositions, as well as the general stages of the activities. Statements categorised as 'product' included those referring to the teachers' descriptions of student's work, as well as any other references to the criteria used for their assessment. Some statements fell into two categories, for example 'product' and 'pupil'. A teacher working in a song composition unit based on African rhythms, explained the meaning of creativity giving the following example of creative pupils:

They try their best to find...the rhythm that's interesting, and not just may be one bit repeating all the way through. (Mary)

In such cases the relationship was noted and categorised according to the context of the conversation and whether the statement was more concerned with the evaluation of products or pupils' characteristics. A further process of data reduction was carried out, producing subcategories under each of the main themes. These subcategories were drawn from the interviews. Some of the subcategories within the 'pupil' category were 'adaptor pupils' ('they work much better if you give them a structure to work with') and 'innovator pupils'. Other subcategories within the 'product' category focussed on originality and musical style.

The approach to analysis and interpretation of data attempted not only to give voice to the teachers' interpretations and theories, but also to consider the outcomes and emerging issues in the context of the general framework. The software program Nvivo was used to assist with the coding of the transcripts. NVivo is the latest version of NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising), a program for computer assisted qualitative data analysis. The advantages and disadvantages of using computers in qualitative research have been widely discussed within the Social Sciences arena. Fielding and Lee (1998) point to the advantages of using computers in qualitative research. Firstly computers can facilitate the task of data management. Decreasing the amount of time devoted to managing data makes the analysis process less tiresome. A second justification is that computers extend the capabilities of qualitative research; for example, allowing a second person to replicate an existing analysis of the data, working in teams if necessary. This possibility is almost impracticable following traditional qualitative techniques of data analysis. The third justification suggested by Fielding and Lee is that software use can enhance credibility and acceptability of qualitative research.

Gahan and Hannibal (1998, p.1) illustrated some fictitious desires and fears that researchers have when beginning to use computer analysis in qualitative studies. Some researchers think that 'the computer will distinguish the important bits and then make all the links between these bits'. In using computers for qualitative enquiry, however, the researchers are still in charge of building up the analysis, having the ideas, engaging with the data and making all the decisions about their study.

## **Observations**

In order to test this research design, a pilot study with secondary music teachers was carried out. Participants taught in three different comprehensive schools, two in the London area and one in a rural county. This enabled the researcher to refine the techniques of gathering data for further studies, as well as to become familiarised with the equipment (e.g. video editing machine). Putting the methods in action was a way of becoming aware of some of their limitations.

One of the points arising from the pilot study was that when asking further questions about the teachers' comments on the videotaped extracts, it would sometimes be necessary to direct the conversation to the preliminary themes (pupil-environment-process-product). As mentioned previously, the interviews should be 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988). This would help to clarify the teachers' views, encouraging them to reflect more deeply on their ideas. It would also be necessary to tape no less than three lessons with each teacher. For example, within a six-week composition project, it would be more likely to have an overall view of the composition process observing one lesson at the beginning, one lesson half way through the project and one lesson at the end.

Another point arising from the study was the length of the interviews. The pilot with the first teacher showed clearly the difficulty of reducing the videotaped lessons from real time to a few extracts easily manageable within a normal interview time schedule. If the extracts were too long or too many, both the interviewer and the interviewee would be spending too much time viewing the tape that could otherwise be used for conducting the interview. During the interviews the participants and the researcher watched the extracts stopping the video after each one, so that they could then comment on them. As one of the

original research questions of the study dealt with the factors associated with the teachers' views on creativity (e.g. educational background), it was necessary to gather information about the participants' musical life and studies without spending too much of the interview time. Another way of finding out about the teachers' background was therefore looked for. In order to save time when interviewing, it was decided to ask teachers to complete a 'Musical Career Path' sheet, derived from Denicolo and Pope (1990). Using an undulating path drawn on a single sheet teachers were asked to think back over their life experience and reflect on specific instances, or critical incidents which they considered had influenced the direction of their musical life, including experiences with their studies, music making and teaching. This technique, called 'critical incident charting' (Denicolo and Pope, 1990), has been used recently by Burnard (2000a) to research how pupils ascribe meaning to improvisation and composition.

The participants' comments during the interviews draw attention to many of the issues addressed in the literature on creativity. They referred to matters such as creative pupils and the assessment of pupils' products, the emotional environment, the intrinsic motivation of the students and the process of composing. The teachers' explanations of their own teaching provided insights into their perceptions of creativity, in relation to the four categories of the framework. The views of the teachers participating in the study seem to support the idea of creativity as a capacity of all students, a view previously suggested in the literature. Given the focus of the paper the analysis of the interview transcripts is not described in detail. This pilot study, nevertheless, exemplified the complexities in defining the term 'creativity', pointing to a need for further research. The trends and issues suggested here may be further explored to see how they stand in relation to the data from a different sample (Odena, 2001c).

The intention in this paper was to illustrate a framework and a practical methodology to be used when enquiring into the music educators' views of creativity. The complex process of shaping the research techniques in response to the type of educational enquiry has been reflected. The purpose was to illustrate a feasible way to explore what meaning music teachers attach to the word creativity. It has been suggested that watching videotaped extracts of music composition and improvisation activities with the teachers involved, and asking them to comment upon the extracts, helped to gather the teachers' views of creativity, that is, their own thoughts in their own words. It is clear that a

statutory curriculum does not lead to the harmonisation of the educators' views. Research into the views of music educators and the factors related to variations in their perceptions is needed. Teachers have their own concept of creativity and these ideas can influence their pedagogic approach and assessment of activities involving creativity (e.g. composition and improvisation). It is hoped that the methods presented here may have relevance for both researchers and practitioners interested in the elicitation of teachers' attitudes.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author is most grateful to all the teachers who participated in the pilot study for their co-operation. He would also like to thank Dr Charles Plummeridge for his help throughout the research process. Fiona Doloughan suggested the title, and Michelle Grady kindly read an early draft of this paper, making many helpful comments and observations, although, naturally, responsibility for the content (and any shortcomings and limitations) rests with the author alone. Finally, the author would like to express his appreciation to the Department of Universities, Research and the Information Society of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (Catalan Autonomous Government) for the award of a 'Batista i Roca' scholarship, which helped to finance the research from which this paper was developed.

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*British Educational Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference.*  
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