

Response

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I am grateful to Ruth Wright and the editors of the journal for inviting me to make this brief response to the fascinating set of articles collected here. Taking the articles as a whole, I wish to offer a few thoughts which came to mind whilst reading them, concerning our roles as music-education researchers and music educators in relation to informal learning.

One topic that I find well-illustrated by this collection of articles, is the importance of ensuring that our research addresses practical pedagogic approaches in school curricula, teacher education courses, and by implication a range of other music teaching and learning contexts. I believe – and I'm sure most music educationalists feel the same – that as researchers in the field of music education we should not fly off into the blue skies of 'theory for theory's sake'; but that at some level, we need to keep our research grounded in either the practicalities of music-teaching and learning, and/or in our intellectual needs to educate ourselves. No researcher, including a 'pure' philosopher, would be likely to support the value of 'theory-for-nothing-else-but-theory's-sake'. All theory has at some point the intention to, or at best the effect of, illuminating and enlightening those who engage with it, and of educating our minds at whatever level is relevant for each individual. I was very much taken as a young girl with a comment that came up in our History class at school; which I have since traced, with the aid of Wikipedia, to Robert Lowe, Vice-President of the Council on Education in England, and with which he made some waves in 1867. He said: 'We must prevail upon our masters [i.e. school-teachers] to educate themselves'. Whilst as music-education researchers we need to be connected to practice, we also need to educate and enlighten ourselves and each other at our own level. At the same time, if our work and our ideas become completely detached from the practice of music education, their value will come under question.

A second and related issue that came to mind, is that some very interesting differences between different countries or contexts are revealed by the articles here, emanating as they do from Sweden, Finland, Greece, Brazil and England. Together they are a useful reminder of how important it is to situate discussions of music curricula and pedagogic practices in the context of governmental policies, as well as the cultural context of whatever country or area of the world we are talking about. An obvious example is that the presence or absence of a national curriculum has a powerful effect on what teachers can do – or believe they can do – in classrooms. This is particularly relevant in the case of (a) popular music and (b) practical activities – whether conceived as informal or not – which allow children to make music themselves.

For example, in England and Wales in the 1960s, we did not have any centralised curriculum control from the government, and there was a significant amount of freedom for teachers to decide their own curricula and especially, pedagogy. In music education, creativity, small group work and all kinds of free exploration using a range of instruments

took place in many schools, spearheaded by the visionary work of John Paynter (1970), George Self (1967), Brian Dennis (1970) Murray Schafer (1967) and others. But, as was pointed out by Graham Vulliamy (1977) and others, this blossoming of creativity and freedom for children to explore music tended to remain within the bounds of 'art' music or contemporary 'classical' music, and significantly excluded popular music. Although popular music soon entered the school curriculum, teachers tended to approach it with pedagogies that were fundamentally not very different from the approaches they used for classical music.

Soon after that point, in 1992 the national curriculum was brought in, and by the turn of the 21st century, music teachers were operating under what they considered to be a certain amount of prescription over what they did. Whether their activities were legally or formally as prescribed as they felt them to be is another matter, and one which it would be interesting to examine in some further research. For myself, this sense of teachers *feeling* constrained by government guidelines was evidenced by the responses of the 32 teachers with whom I worked on bringing informal pedagogies, along with pupils' own choice of music, into the secondary classroom (as part of the 'Musical Futures' project, www.musicalfutures.org; Green, 2008). If those pedagogies had been introduced in English classrooms during the 1960s, teachers would probably have found them considerably less challenging; although they would have been more inclined to question the value of the pupils' own choices of music as curriculum content.

In Sweden, on the other hand, I have learnt from this journal issue (Georgii-Hemming and Westvall) that the curriculum was de-centralised just at the time that the curriculum in England and Wales was being centralised. This de-centralisation evidently led to the take-up of informal approaches to teaching and learning in Swedish classrooms; and that happened just at the time when popular music was beginning to be recognised as having some musical, educational and cultural value, and was being accepted into schooling not only in Sweden but the UK and many other countries. Teachers in Sweden in the early 1990s were therefore in a different position when it came to combining free exploratory or creative learning practices with their new popular music curriculum content, than were teachers in England and Wales at that time.

Similar relationships between governmental policies, school curricula and pedagogies can of course be traced in every country. It is important that as music educationalists and researchers, we are aware of these kinds of wider historical issues when evaluating theory and practice, and when devising new theories or practical approaches. As a whole, the articles in this special issue of the *BJME* suggest that, especially in this globalised and globalising world, there is a current need for further work in comparative music education, including comparative research into the history of music education. This kind of work could usefully be of a theoretical sort that is not in itself necessarily directly applied to practice, but as I mentioned earlier, has value for educating ourselves at our own level. Comparative educational studies are of course in themselves a highly complex specialist field, and in music education we are perhaps only just beginning this work.

Another issue that is very helpfully raised by these articles, is the need to avoid confusing the concept of informality, or that of informal pedagogy, with a 'what would you like to do today?' kind of approach. As with so many terms in the English language (since that is the language we are communicating in here), the term 'informal' has a multitude

of meanings, and can easily be misinterpreted, especially by those who would wish to cast doubt on the validity of informal approaches within education. We would benefit from further careful philosophical discussions of the different possible meanings and uses of the terms 'formal', 'informal' and 'non-formal', along the lines of some of the present articles, and of Folkestad's article (2006) which set out to closely examine these complex concepts. Informality arising from a pedagogy that is vague, direction-less and devoid of any teacher-input is of course not the same thing as informality arising from a pedagogy that is thoughtfully derived from, and carefully structured upon the real-world learning practices of musicians in the informal realm. This kind of approach puts the concept of 'informality' in a dialectic with the concept of 'education' – the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory, but rather 'education' can be adapted to incorporate some aspects of the 'informal' in certain ways, and vice versa.

This brings me to another thought, which is that in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of criticisms were expressed of the creative music movement in Britain, notably by teachers in classrooms (see for example, comments made by teachers recorded in Green, 2002, 2008b). These criticisms often alighted on the problem of progression – that pupils enjoyed one or two lessons of 'creativity' but that both pupils and teachers were uncertain as to how to progress further. The non-centralised curriculum of the time did nothing to guide teachers on this matter either. Similar criticisms of informal pedagogies in the de-centralised curriculum in Sweden seem to have been made, and it is again interesting that these have occurred in the context of a curriculum that affords teachers a high degree of autonomy.

There is a subtle but crucial distinction to be made, also, between a curriculum that is centralised through governmental policy, and a curriculum that is optional but that becomes 'fixed'. As Finney and Philpott point out in this journal issue, such fixity may be a danger facing the Musical Futures approach at present, which could be at risk of becoming 'commodified' and 'packaged' as a 'formula'. The same situation could of course be identified in many other approaches and countries. Another distinction which can be helpful to bear in mind, is that between 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy'. A curriculum seems to me to be much more at risk of being commodified and packaged as a formula, than a pedagogical method. Although curriculum and pedagogy are of course always intertwined, pedagogy is that much more in the hands of the teacher when he or she is 'on the spot', and that much more susceptible to individual interpretation and therefore, change, evolution and development – for the better as well as for the worse – than curriculum.

One area which is particularly susceptible to rapid change, in the world beyond education as well as within education, is that of digital technology and communications. As Vakeva makes so clear in his article in this journal issue, the interface between digital technology, the Internet, and informal music learning outside the classroom is currently challenging many of music education's previously unquestioned assumptions about ownership, creativity, teaching and learning. This particularly applies to the ways in which children, young people, and musicians/music-listeners of all ages are using technology informally to access, mix and create new forms of music. Again, although many music educationalists are now working in the field of digital technology, we will need more work of this kind as time moves speedily on. In particular, it is becoming increasingly important for us to understand more about how the Internet and digital technology are being used informally, and what possibilities these uses might suggest to us. At the same

time, we cannot assume that all technology is necessarily good or is equally available or attractive to all learners. There are many issues of social inclusion, particularly along gender and class lines, which will present us with ever-new challenges in this area.

As is well-illustrated by Feichas and Karlsen in this journal, the needs of students with backgrounds or interests in popular music at Higher Education level tend to be very different from the needs of students in the more traditional conservatoire or university courses of the recent past. How to accommodate this diversity of needs, and how to provide a valid music educational experience which can be accredited across the different musical styles is a very real challenge. Furthermore, when students from diverse backgrounds enter into teacher-training, these problems can be amplified, as the research by Wright and Kanellopoulos in this journal implies. At a practical level, they and others here emphasise the importance of affording trainee teachers experiences of music-making and music-learning which relate to the informal pedagogies that they might be asked to use themselves in their teaching. Some of the data presented gives us insights into how classically trained student teachers responded to ways of making music which, despite their high levels of training, they had not previously experienced. It is perhaps especially important for classically trained musicians who are learning to teach in schools, to discover through practical experience that the ways in which they acquired their musical skills are by no means the only ways. If teachers are going to use informal methods in the classroom then surely the best way to educate them is by putting them in the position of being novice learners in the informal realm themselves.

Related to that, one factor which I find particularly enlightening across all these articles, is how revealing and interesting it is to hear the voices of learners themselves – whether they are children, teenagers, students in Higher Education or others – talking or writing reflective diaries about their experiences of music-making and music-learning. Data which in some way gets inside the thoughts and experiences of research-subjects seems to be so necessary in this period of musical and cultural diversity. Again, as music-educationalists and researchers we need to educate ourselves, and reading books and articles is not the only way to do that. There is so much to learn from opening our eyes and ears to the world of informal musical engagement, as well as that of formal music education, and most particularly from considering the interface between the two. As these articles suggest, this is an exciting time to be involved in music education.

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