Part 5: Creativities and the Wider Community—Chapter 5.34

Creativities *in* music and creativities *through* music: Symbiotic weaknesses in Greek-Cypriot Primary Education

Abstract

The important role that creativities play in children's cultural, social and emotional development has been well recognised. Nevertheless, studies have also revealed that creativity is often a neglected aspect in music education. Based on data collected through interviews with 10 music teachers, this chapter addresses the insufficient creativity in music education practice in Greek-Cypriot Primary education. The aim of this chapter is to offer an overview of the symbiotic weaknesses of the approach to creativities through music in Primary education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system, examining how music teaching has been deployed as a tool for strategic interests. In addition, it highlights the need for a change in mentality on the part of the agents that constitute the leaders and managers of the educational system in Greek-Cypriot Primary schools, shedding light on broader pedagogical aspects of the music lesson as vital for the development of creativities in music and through music.

Keywords: musical creativities, Primary Education, teachers, qualitative research

Research on Creativities

An extensive list of researchers across a wide range of domains (e.g., Richardson & Saffle, 1983; Magyari-Beck, 1988; Running, 2008; Davies, Jindal-Snape, Collier, Digby, Hay, & Howe, 2013; Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2017; Kaufman, Glaveanu, & Baer, 2017) have been involved in the study of creativity ever since Guilford (1950) pointed to it as a worthwhile topic for systematic research.

The research that has been undertaken in the area of creativity, or creativities (Burnard, 2012) as we explain below, within the last 60 years has focused on the so-called Four 'P's' framework (Rhodes, 1961): 'person', that is, the characteristics of creative individuals (e.g., Barron, 1955; Barron & Harrington, 1981; Dellas & Gaier, 1970; Feist, 1999; Helson, 1999; MacKinnon, 1962; Rimm, Davis, & Bien, 1982;

Selby, Shaw, & Houtz, 2005; Vervalin, 1962; Oleynick et al., 2017; Fürst & Grin, 2018); 'place/press' (from pressures), that is, the most suitable environment for nurturing creativity (e.g., Roe, 1952; Selby, Shaw, & Houtz, 2005; Meusburger, 2009; Chan & Yuen, 2014; Jensen, 2015; Richardson & Mishra, 2018; Jankowska & Karwowski, 2018); the creative 'process', that is, the thinking about how creative outcomes can be achieved (e.g., Wallas, 1926; Runco & Chand, 1995; Amabile, 1983; Mednick, 1962; Guilford, 1968; Finke, Ward & Smith, 1992; Simonton, 1999; Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010); and 'product', that is, how an output is defined and assessed as creative (e.g. Amabile, 1982; Hounchell, 1985; Besemer & O'Quin, 1986; Treffinger, 1996; Lubart, 1999; Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004; Matsunobu, 2007; Silvia et al., 2008; Odena, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2014; Fürst & Grin, 2018).

In a world, however, where "music takes myriad social forms" (Born, 2005, p. 7), the numerous contemporary music creative practices (e.g., DJing, film and video game sound designing and songwriting) and the wide diversity of the actors in the field that work together to create music, asserting of a single musical creativity for all musics is rather problematic. We thus advance the notion, argued by Burnard (2012), for conceptual expansion of musical creativity, as "musical creativities assume many forms, and serve many diverse functions, and are deeply embedded in the dynamic flux and mutation of a musician's personal and sociocultural life" (p. 213). Such a view provides the foundation for advancing new approaches to music education, to think and do differently as well as find new ways to discuss different and diverse enactments and manifestations of music creativities.

Research has also recognised the important role that multiple musical creativities play in human cultural, social and emotional development (e.g., Cropley,

1997; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Jauk, Benedek, Dunst, & Neubauer, 2013; Rosenstock & Riordan, 2016; Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne & Schneider, 2017; Frey & Osborne, 2017; Randles, 2020). In particular, among the reported benefits of fostering students' creativities are a more balanced psychological functioning (Rasulzada & Dackert, 2009), greater academic success (Gajda, Karwowski & Beghetto, 2017), a boost to students' creative self-efficacy and, thus, more positive self-beliefs about their academic abilities in all subject areas, as well as higher levels of participation in after-school activities (Beghetto, 2006). In view of the foregoing, educational discourses have highlighted the importance of creative performance (e.g., Jeffrey & Craft, 2006) and suggest that sowing the seeds of creative activity in education is a necessary, in fact, primary goal (Fisher, 2005).

Nevertheless, research has revealed also that there is a complex interplay between creativity and the degree to which this is recognised as an essential feature of teachers' professional roles (Burnard & White, 2008), with the diversity of creative practices being a neglected aspect of education (Robinson, 2006; Berliner, 2011) resulting in a difficulty with regard to their development in the classroom (Sternberg, 2015). This side-lining of creativities in customary music education practice and the related struggles that music teachers encounter in the school environment are discussed in this chapter, based on findings (Makris, Welch & Himonides, 2021) that suggest that there is a relatively unsophisticated, or to put it more bluntly, inappropriate conception and use of music in the Greek-Cypriot Primary education.

Creativities in Education

Creativity in society and the economy has been described as "the driving force that moves civilisation forward" (Jauk, Benedek, Dunst, & Neubauer, 2013, p. 213) and "as a major driver of economic growth and prosperity (…) [in] realising human potential"

(Hodges, 2004, p. 15, as cited in Hodges, 2005). Universities from all around the world have also recognised creativity as an important attribute for a successful professional career (Petocz et al., 2009) and thus as an essential factor for a business' long-term growth (Robinson & Stern, 1997). Perhaps unsurprisingly, political speeches have also heralded the value of creative thinking in economies, society, communities, and education (Katz-Buonincontro, 2012).

It should not be surprising then that initiatives for nurturing creativities in education flourished in several countries in the latter part of the 20th century (Woods et al, 1997), along with the emergence of economic globalisation. Curricular and instructional reforms, designed with a common objective to promote (more) creativity by pupil and teacher, have been suggested (e.g., Randles, 2013; Kaschub, M., & Smith, 2014), or enacted with the aim of raising creativity as a new standard in education (Grigorenko, 2019). A prime example of the outcome of that reformation period was the reported "creative decade" in England – the opening decade of the new century, "characterised by growth in creativity practices" (Craft et al., 2014, p. 16) and matched with "proliferation of research, systematic reviews and reports on creative teaching and learning" (Burnard & White, 2008, p. 670). This decade was in response to the new UK Labour Government's initiative in 1998 to set up a The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE). This led to a ground-breaking report the following year (NACCCE, 1999) which argued that "no education system can be world-class without valuing and integrating creativity in teaching and learning, in the curriculum, in management and leadership and without linking this to promoting knowledge and understanding of cultural change and diversity" (p. 16).

Topics that attracted most of the research discussion during that period included the concept of creativity, the demystification of the perception that creative performance

in any field is only for geniuses, the creative process, as well as how to nurture and measure children's potential for creative thinking (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007; Mi et al., 2020).

Despite the growing interest in creativity in general, and for advancing it in education in particular, a number of challenges to its implementation in education have been identified. In fact, an uneasy relationship between institution-based education and creativity has been noticed. For example, Maley and Kiss (2018) have warned about over-prescriptive as well as centralised approaches to teaching and learning that threaten to extinguish engagement with creativity, as well as banish creative activity. Concerns have also been raised about terminology, conflicts in policy and practice, curriculum constraints and pedagogical approaches (*cf* Craft, 2003). Despite all the initiatives and research in praise of creativity, its realisation in educational systems continues to be uneven at best, or missing at worst (Piirto, 2004; Robinson, 2006; Bronson & Merryman, 2010).

Having laid out an introductory picture of general interest and research activity in creativities in education in recent decades, including an assessment of the challenges and limits to prioritising it in education, in what follows we examine the context of music as a subject in the Greek-Cypriot education, thus setting the ground for the purpose of this chapter.

Music in the Greek-Cypriot Primary Education

The Ministry of Education and Culture is financially and legally responsible for the Cyprus Educational System (Tsiakkiros, 2005). A school's leadership and management is the responsibility of the Head Teacher, whose role is to be supportive to staff and students, holding progressive academic beliefs and views, whilst also acknowledging and considering the views of the community (Tsiakkiros, 2005). By 'views of the

community' one should also understand the "parents' expectations concerning the aims, style and significance of school celebrations" (Forari, 2005, p. 21). In fact, the importance given to the views of the community can affect significantly a music teachers' responsibilities and duties, as they are expected to present music programmes for every formal and informal school event or extra-curricular activity (see below).

Music in the Greek-Cypriot education is compulsory for the six grades of Primary Education and, as far as official policy is concerned, it aims to provide children with musical knowledge as well as with the cultivation of skills, values, attitudes and behaviours, through practical, experiential musical activities of listening, performing and creating music (MoEC, 2021).

Regarding the content of Primary music education, the music curriculum mentions that the subject of music seeks to familiarise students with local and global music cultures. Having this as a goal, students are invited to learn about music of various genres and styles, the socio-cultural contexts and the representative composers of each style and era. In particular, there are five suggested thematic areas (Greek and Cypriot music, World music, Western music, Popular music, and Music and other art forms) from which teachers may draw content to develop their own teaching units (MoEC, 2021).

As for specific references to musical creativity in policy documents, while there is frequent use of the term in the Music Curriculum (MoEC, 2021), the case with the Greek-Cypriot Primary education echoes Odena's (2012) remark that creativity is often used to describe (1) improvisation and composition activities, where students learn by making music by themselves, instead of just imitating them, and (2) a desirable way of thinking, referring specifically to critical thinking.

Finally, a diversity in music teacher backgrounds that Wong (2010) identified in her study appears alto to apply in the context of Greek-Cypriot Primary public education. In particular, music teachers can be classified into (1) those who studied general education at university, yet because of their already established music knowledge, they choose to teach music only; (2) those who studied general education and who may occasionally teach music (for example, when there is a need for someone to teach the subject because there is no colleague in their schools who is specialised in music); and, (3) those who studied music only and who may not have any formal academic background in education and thus only teach music. The plurality of these music teachers, and the resulting diversity of individual beliefs, personal and professional perspectives, contributes to an "a la carte" interpretation of the music curricula (Forari, 2005) and the ways that teachers perceive creativity (Makris, 2021).

However, even though researchers have studied music teachers' perceptions of creativity (e.g., Odena, 2003; Fairfield, 2010; Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012; Snell, 2013; Randles & Muhonen, 2015; Randles & Ballantyne, 2018; Kladder & Lee, 2019; Randles & Tan, 2019), an important question yet to be asked is, to what extent does the school environment influence music teachers' approaches in their efforts to develop students' musical creativities. In fact, despite the significant amount of research in the field, there are limited qualitative studies focusing on how music teachers, as key agents in the effort of "instilling a creative identity in the lives of music students" (Randles, 2012, abstract), approach musical creativities in practice. We argue that making music teachers' implicit experiences of the school environment explicit may contribute to our overall understanding of how musical creativities can better be fostered in music education. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to offer a comprehensive – even if

limited – picture of the relationship between Primary music teachers and their school environments in the Greek-Cypriot Primary Education.

Methods

The data on which this chapter is based were collected from interviews with 10 music teachers, using a video elicitation technique (VET) (Jewitt, 2012). Drawing upon other researchers' work (Silvers, 1977; Lennon, 1996; Odena, 2001a), whose methodology involved video-recorded practices of their participants, the participants in this study discussed their experiences in relation to creativity, commenting on video vignettes (Hazel, 1995). We explored their perspectives of the phenomenon in relation to four areas: (1) the 'person', that is, the characteristics of students and teachers that they considered to be creative; (2) the 'process', that is, the practices and activities that teachers seek to apply to the learning environment in order to nurture creativity, as well as their approaches to assessing students' creativity; (3) the 'product/output', that is, how they define a creative output; and (4) the 'place/environment', that is, how the school environment influences the students and their creativity in music education.

The participants were purposefully selected according to the needs of the study (Morse, 1991), based on their educational and professional backgrounds. Hence, because of the diverse types of music teachers in Greek-Cypriot Primary Education, the participants that were invited to share their experience in the present study were thus selected in order to draw from the three respective groups described above. This gave us the opportunity to look at the phenomenon of creativity from different perspectives.

Validity

In order to produce consistent results, the study was engaged in the following validation techniques: peer debriefing and external auditing with external researchers in order to

assess the accuracy of the analysis and the results. Triangulation was achieved through corroborating evidence from the participants' interviews and the supplementary materials, which they considered to be creative, and they were invited to bring with them in the interview process (e.g., audio and video samples). "This approach set the participants' perceptions, grounded in actual examples, and formed the starting points for the discussions to gain insight into the meanings behind the activities of their choices, which carried implicit theories and views of what were perceived to be really meaningful for them" (Makris, 2019, p. 94).

Analyses and Results

The research analyses of the data consisted of seven phases (*cf* Colaizzi, 1978): (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) identification of significant statements; (3) formulation of meanings; (4) generation of themes; (5) exhaustive description; (6) formulation of a fundamental structure, that is, condensation of participants' description to short and dense statements that captured the essential aspects of the phenomenon; and (7) verification of this fundamental structure by inviting the participants to validate the findings.

The analyses revealed that the pedagogical practice of music education in the Greek-Cypriot Primary Education appears to suffer from several weaknesses. First, the subject of music within the curriculum is reported to be undervalued and, second, for that it seems to be exploited as a reflection of the quality of the school services. As a consequence, there is a reported perception of insufficient time for music teaching, and pressure on music teachers and students to focus more on the output of music activities for the annual special events.

For example, Participant 1 mentioned: "Music as a subject is not taken seriously by parents and consequently by the head teachers. Greater attention is paid, even by parents, to subjects such as maths and Greek language". This emerged also in the interview with Participant 8:

> *I've been fortunate enough to work and collaborate, with no problem, with my colleagues and with the students […]. I know, however, as I am the President of the Sectoral Music Committee, that many colleague musicians have had problems with other colleagues, [e.g.,] they underestimate their work, their time spent, their output, [….] but, each teacher thinks of his own subject: "OK, your subject [music] is not that important, they will not need it in their lives."*

The fact that music is considered inferior to other subjects was also raised in the discussion with Participant 2:

> *It takes time, if you work properly, to appreciate that your subject is important. […] Also, when they [colleagues] see your first or second [school] performance or observe your lesson then, they realise "OK there is something here" and my experience has shown that, year after year, I mean the first year they may see you as "She is the music teacher, she will fulfil our needs" and then they start appreciating you.*

Participant 3, however, explained the situation from a different point of view:

[T]eachers, particularly of the third or the fourth grades onwards, feel [in] awe because it is the subject that you can't teach with no knowledge. […] And, as a music teacher, I have had very good [and] positive experiences, a very good approach and respect from colleagues. […], but I have been working hard for it. What I've heard about others [is that] they don't talk the same about everyone […]. So they respect you according to the work you do.

It can be argued, therefore, that music, as a subject, presents particular challenges. For example, in a performance-based context, those educators with limited music knowledge are likely to be in a disadvantageous position with respect to teaching music and preparing students for school ceremonies, as the performance of the school choir and/or orchestra is seen as a reflection of the music teacher's capabilities and on which they (music teachers) are judged. Audience attendance was reported to cause great pressure for Participant 9:

Parents will attend [the events] and […] the music teacher will not be relaxed. He has to achieve, to produce a high standard, 'worth-listening-to' piece of music; so he will not include in the choir and the orchestra [any] second category [musically weak] students […]. They [students] think that we are being video-recorded now; and many times it happens that we see ourselves on YouTube and, personally, I carefully try not to listen to them; honestly, I can't stand it. I will find mistakes, it's impossible that I will not. […] [T]he fact that parents attend adds another dimension, it's as if you are then on air.

Participant 10 also said that she took great care in order to achieve a worthwhile result and so avoid any possible criticism or questioning of her abilities:

> *I try not to end up there, [that is] to have a bad result. […] I know it's stressful, it's very stressful, but I try in every way that I can, that is, I may go back and forth from one school to another to have the students rehearse again and again with the students, or to present in such a way so there is a good result. Personally, I've never been in that position to say "Oh, what a bad performance" and anyhow be criticised. But I've heard other colleagues received bad comments, because they themselves didn't achieve their goals.*

What may be suggested then is that being focused on achieving a worthwhile outcome – such as finely tuned and repertoire-rich orchestras and choirs – in order to avoid negative criticism, can be a reason that a public output becomes more important for those teaching music. This may explain the pressure that music teachers feel and the time they devote for the ceremony preparations. For example, participant 1 explained that teachers spend much time in their music lessons in preparing students for school events, which are part of the school system: "[a] huge part of music in Cyprus public Primary schools, particularly in high grades, you squander in preparing a music show. When I say huge, I mean definitely 60 per cent. […] [I]t's so much labour, not a creative process at all [laughs]". As a result, the participant resorts to non-creative music choices in order to perfect her product, as such occasions are seen as another 'test' for music teachers to prove their competence. Participant 2 also highlighted the pressure on the music teachers: "There are many music teachers who are oppressed

because of the school events”. She went on to explain that the heavy schedule of school events works against musical creativity:

> *[I]f you are in a school where the head teacher strictly follows the rules, the school events etc. and suffocates the school, may cause you trouble in terms of what and how to present [in school events] and intrude into your job, meaning that this stresses you, and when you are stressed, the first thing you try to do is to do the most necessary things from the book so that you don’t get into trouble.*

The numerous ceremonies and the pressure that they cause to the teachers and the students was also mentioned by Participant 8:

> *[T]he events are some kind of pressure for us […]. I think this works against the children because there is the time pressure, which impels them to leave behind other activities that are important for them[;] […] we push them to learn the song or play the instruments because they will present and they have to be perfect, standing, walking, being quiet and discreet, while being arranged by height. So, these things are a bit restrictive.*

Participant 10 also stressed the lack of time for the preparation of the events:

> *[T]ime is not enough to do both my lesson, as I want to, and to prepare the choir and the orchestra. Time is too short. At some point, however, by necessity, we neglect the subject, the teaching that takes place with all the children and has to be done. We devote our time to events, particularly if it's a school with demands, as such schools, have high standards.*

Therefore, the time issue obliges Participant 10 to sacrifice music teaching time for the sake of rehearsals, because the performance she will present is very important both for her, who wants to have a proper, well-sounding choir and orchestra, and for the school, of which the two ensembles are part of the its public image. Invited to explain what she means when stating "…if it's a school with demands, as such schools have high standards", Participant 10 portrayed the broad image of such schools:

> *I will talk generally, not just about music, about other subjects too, such as school plays, for example, where kids constantly do rehearsals, again and again; the costumes that they will wear also have to be nice and impressive... and I believe that somehow this ruins our relationship with the kids because, having them always for rehearsal, kids get tired and we also get tired, and at some point you will come into conflict with the kids. You may say something that you don't mean because of the tension and I think this ruins our relationship with the kids. And reasonably, as kids, they get tired, but we have expectations, […] and [so] there's tension. [...] [A]nd because there is comparison among schools, "The other school did that thing for that event, we should do something better" and so on.*

Apparently, the school quality and image are reflected through the events and, more particularly, through the 'quality' that their music and theatrical performances will demonstrate.

In view of the foregoing, there is a picture of a non-ideal school environment for nurturing creativity in music education. The undervaluing of the subject, but more

importantly, the excessive bias in the amount of time devoted to the preparation of school events and the instrumentalisation of the subject are the two greatest issues.

Discussion

There seems to be a bias towards school events over creativities in the teaching of music in the Greek-Cypriot Primary education. An unsophisticated use and approach to music as a curriculum subject that generates tension and exposes symbiotic weaknesses within implemented policies, ultimately failing opportunities for diverse creative activities within music education. In particular, the undervaluing and appropriation of music as a reflection of the quality of school service carries negative consequences: lack of time, pressure on music teachers and students, as well as a focus on the output of music activities rather than the process.

Admittedly, undervaluing may sound oxymoronic especially when music is adopted to reflect the schools' academic excellence and high-quality services. This may be explained as follows: according to the participants of the study, finely tuned music ensembles are ubiquitous throughout the school year, appearing in almost every school event. As mentioned above, concentrating on achieving a well-sounding musical performance in order to avoid criticism may be a reason why the public output becomes more important for the music teachers. Behind this odd instance, however, may lie vested interests, such as personnel with career advancement prospects, or aspirations to maintain a self-image of successful management, at least, in the local community, acknowledge the power and resonance of music: the emotional charge, the excitement, the overall atmosphere and even the admiration it brings to a festive or ceremonial event.

However, schools need to provide more support to music teachers and be less concerned – although by no means unconcerned – about the music output of the school

events: namely, the good-sounding, good-looking, finely tuned, repertoire-rich orchestras and choirs, which appear in school ceremonies. Otherwise, performances become compulsory and the music teachers' attention focuses on the output, cutting out or minimising conditions and time for creativity, such as passing control time to students, encouraging risk-taking, experimenting with sound and improvising. Supportive creative musical activities provide a greater sense of agency and ownership for pupils. Afterall, it should be music teachers' goal to "give students faith in their own means of expression and provide them with the ability to distinguish between different kinds of musical creativities" (Burnard, 2012, p. 237). There is no reason why creative music making should not lead to musical products which can be equally celebrated publicly as the performance of established repertoire. Otherwise, the current repertoire performance bias will continue to generate a challenge regarding the development of creativities through the music subject (Sternberg, 2015).

In addition, it seems that music has become a low educational priority, particularly in contrast to literacy and mathematics (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009; Makris, 2019) and it is used to achieve non-educational, or at least non-primary-educational goals. This phenomenon, however, contradicts what literature suggests about the prime purposes of music education (e.g., Rainbow, 2006; Hallam & Council, 2015). Pitts (2017) recognises that "one of the many things music education is for [...], is fostering a creatively engaged society [...] leaving opportunities open, not closing them down; offering routes and role models for lifelong engagement" (p. 166). However, musical development in terms of mastering an established Western canon requires many years commitment (Weisberg, 2010); if a performance is not well prepared, music teachers may not wish to present it at the school events, particularly at those to which students' parents and distinguished personalities from the community,

including from the Ministry of Education, are invited, as this may reflect negatively on themselves, the school's image and its management. However, clearly musical performances at school events should not be seen to represent a school's overall academic excellence and the quality of its services. Ultimately, this would be a counter-productive practice for both educators and students because of the generation of the pressure and the focus on the output of music activities, instead of the process. Last, but not least, the school community, which includes parents and distinguished personalities, are not adequately qualified to make judgements on the school's academic excellence or the teacher's professional level. Finally, there is a prevailing perception that intelligence is linked to successful performance in modern Greek and mathematics, with the music subject possessing a poor status. This reiterates the findings of other studies (e.g., Robinson, 2006; Berliner, 2011), which have warned that creativity may be a neglected aspect of education, or a non-realised educational goal (Piirto, 2004; Bronson & Merryman, 2010). To put it bluntly, the tough truth is that in an environment where language and mathematic subjects, as well as school ceremonies, are omnipotent, it may be futile to expect recognition for such an elusive concept as musical creativity unless the outcomes of such creativity can also be celebrated publicly. Admittedly, there is a need for a change in mentality on the part of the agents that constitute the leadership in the current educational system. We all need to realise that if the aim is to encourage (more) musical creativities in the schools, we need to clarify how we perceive and conceptualise the music subject, rethink about the time devoted to it and the expectations we have from the educators and pupils.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide suggestive evidence of the tension between creativity and current biases in the practice of music education in schools. It seems that

the primary goal of the music subject in the context of the Greek-Cypriot education is to produce successful choir and/or band performances at the numerous school events in order to reflect the school's excellent functioning and quality of services. This phenomenon obstructs the development of musical creativity in Greek-Cypriot education. The subject of music, which according to policy documents (MoEC, n.b.d.) is supposed to nurture creativity, seems to have become an instrument for other political interests. This reflect's Sternberg's observation that "governments say they want creativity, but their actions belie their words" (2006, 2). Such charges, although harsh, are nevertheless articulated by the participants in this study. Finally, even though the study has been conducted within the Greek-Cypriot context, it could be possible that such biased approach to music may be similarly applied beyond. Further research needs to be conducted to examine other school personnel's perceptions of creativity and whether they recognise that school events are favoured over music creativity, as well as what actions need to be taken in order to resolve the tension between creativity and music education.

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