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Music in Education

Every Man a Creative Artist?

How can you impose a structure on the fostering of creativity? Is there not something irreconcilable about a plan for the unpredictable? If each child is to have the opportunity to make of music something of his or her own, why is it customary in music classes that the children are constantly directed by someone else? In this essay Vaughan moves from the impasse in face of these problems, to which many are accustomed, to recommending ways of resolving them — ways that require an attitude that accepts using research and theoretical models in order to give focus to the creative activities of a teacher's classroom. A high degree of preparatory structure does often precipitate the most creative outcomes.

There has always been a wide-spread assumption that the arts are by nature creative and hence that if we introduce arts programmes into the schools we are taking care of the creative side of the curriculum. Curiously enough, this idea has remained entrenched in the public mind despite much evidence to the effect that — in music programmes at least — students often graduate with rigidities of mind and practice which scarcely fit anyone's definition of *creative*.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the potential for creative development which resides in the music programme is in fact no more than that residing in any other curricular area if indeed no less. We must then first mount an argument for creative education in general, after which we can look at the ways in which music education might be enhanced by creative thinking.

Surely creative education is not for everyone, we are told; this way lies anarchy! We must reply that such an argument is a red herring. The one point on which we are all united is that our children should be given the opportunity to develop to their full potential within our educational systems. Furthermore, our society regards highly, if nervously, the independent thinker and innovative

decision-maker. Whether we are interested in enlightened governance or in the gross national product, in supreme physical performance or in radical ideological reform, it is the break-through kind of thinking that moves us forward. Creative education is therefore too important to be left to the laws of chance or the survival of the fittest.

As to the role of the arts in education, we side with Drake in thinking that "a free and civilizing education should seek to make of every man a creative artist in accordance with his potential."[1] Again the cry: if everyone were an artist, who would keep the world turning? But this is another red herring. Must we assume that the artist and the entrepreneur cannot exist in the same person? Instead of compartmentalizing ourselves, if each individual cultivated the many facets of himself which together would assure the equilibrium of social and personal skills we all admire would we not be healthier and more productive personalities?

For the proper province of the arts is individual expression in idealized form, free of the retribution of the market place and the irreversibility of daily events. The arts are media for the projection and examination of the whole range of human existence, for the ordered and orderly inspection of our innermost thoughts and feelings. Through art we can reflect on the human condition: not a mere cathartic function, but a gesture of self-realization and growth.

It is possible for music not to be creative

How is it possible then that music could *not* be creative? Simply in the thousand ways in which we push for conformity — in performance groups, in dead ritual, in doctrinaire thinking, in closed system instruction. Indeed society's mandate to the schools is to teach for conformity; it is important that everyone fit the system. It is not surprising, therefore, that our musical models are brass bands, choral societies, and the like. Even jazz bands and choirs, once vehicles for individual initiative and creative invention, have in our schools become stylized, ossified imitations of the real thing.

There have been — on the Canadian scene, as elsewhere — some outstanding attempts to lure music education into an experimental frame of mind. Murray Schafer in the sixties began his "ear cleaning" campaign, and for many Canadian teachers it was the first time they had heard the traditional curriculum being challenged. Bang on garbage can lids? Make up your own notation? Whatever next!

The ground swell had already begun at much the same time in America with the Contemporary Music Project and in England with John Paynter and several others. The time was ripe to break out of stultifying, anachronistic teaching practices and to begin instead to teach twentieth century idioms in an

exploratory frame of mind. As the Manhattanville curriculum put it, "the student is a musician from the moment of the first strategy."[2]

Music educators have found such ideas exciting, provocative — and irritating. The irritation stems partly from a feeling of insecurity at relinquishing their traditional roles as conductor, drill sergeant, or whatever, and partly from a misunderstanding of the intent of such approaches. There is no suggestion that improvisation should be a way of avoiding substantive musical learning. Rather it is an alternative vehicle for a more intensive and personalized study of the traditional fundamentals, and has the added advantage of incorporating twentieth century idioms with equal ease. In the hands of the insensitive teacher, however, such programmes often result in the fulfilment of the critics' worst fears — lack of rigour and eventual total collapse.

Composition: the essential challenge

In imaginative hands, however, the students are exercising their problem-solving and decision-making skills all the way up the conceptual spiral. It was Alfred North Whitehead who said that "understanding always involves the notion of composition,"[3] and in this view learning and creativity are inextricably linked. The learner composes, combines, and recombines, growing in logical capacity as he grows in aesthetic capacity.

While such a model is by no means limited to the arts, there is in music a resource of many dimensions — temporal, acoustic, formal, affective — in which composition is the essential challenge. Musical performance becomes, under such circumstances, not a matter of mind-numbing drill but of personal and ideational initiative.

Whitehead makes the further point that the development of both logical and aesthetic capacity should be companion goals:

> . . .they are both concerned with the enjoyment of a composition, as derived
> from the inter-connections of its factors (and) if either side of this antithesis
> sinks into the background, there is trivialization of experience, logical and
> aesthetic.[4]

It should be emphasized that the art of composition goes beyond mere juxtaposition. "What is required if the elements are to be composed into an aesthetic whole is the presence of an ordering system of beliefs and attitudes which make them mutually relevant to one another."[5] And there, of course, is the hitch. How do we go about the ordering of a system of beliefs without imposing the kind of dogmatism we all find morally repugnant?

One answer must surely lie in the so-called eclectic approach to the examination of musical systems, a willingness to explore the significance of a work

or a system *in terms of itself,* free of the need to "take sides." There is the world of difference between mere tolerance and actual appreciation. As Langer says, tolerance is exercised "precisely where we do *not* understand other people's expressions . . ."[6]

Focus from a research format

There is much assistance available for putting creative ideas into practice in the music classroom (see the list of creative handbooks appended). What is thin on the ground at the moment is empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of such programmes. This paucity may stem partly from the view that creativity is not a fit subject for systematic research, or perhaps that the imposition of a research format would by definition be anti-creative. It has been this writer's experience, however, that creative musical activities can be relatively easily constructed if based on a defensible theoretical model of some kind, and that a research format focuses rather than inhibits creative behaviour.

The following theoretical model was used in a study to determine the extent to which a creative musical programme would result in gains on certain creativity measures with Grade Five students (Vaughan 1975).[7] A scan of the literature on creativity brought out five principles or characteristics of creative thinking which seemed to have particular application to musical processes and behaviours:

1) Flexibility, or the ability to switch from one category to another, to break a "mental set."
2) Associative thinking, either linking two or more apparently disparate elements, or chaining ideas to one another.
3) Bisociation, or the simultaneous development of several ideas, mutually co-existing and yet independent in character.
4) Metaphorical thinking, or the ability to create and sustain analogies as a major source of ideas.
5) Synthesizing, or integrative thinking, the ability to pull many elements together and give them a new significance because of this interaction.

An experimental programme was devised, using group and individual improvisation and guided listening as the major strategies. The regular classroom teachers did the teaching, and at the end of ten weeks certain trends emerged, chief among which was that the experimental group made statistically significant gains ($p. < .05$) in fluency and synthesizing ability. Other findings were less clear, and their implications debatable. Nonetheless it does remain to investigate the area more thoroughly if we are to secure a place for creative programmes in the wider curriculum.

Some definitions and a purpose

We have managed to reach this point in the discussion without directly tackling the question of definitions, though of course they are implicit in much that has been said. It is a fact, however, that one could choose to operate with a different definition each week without repeating oneself oftener than once a year. There are definitions of the person, the process, the product. There are systems models, existential models, problem-solving models. There are psychoanalytic theories, holistic theories, neurological theories. One has only to take one's pick. The important thing is to be clear about what position one is taking at any given time, because without a basic theoretical organizer the relatively unstructured and unpredictable nature of the activities will tend to dissipate the central intent in a kind of centripetal fashion.

One hastens to underscore the *"relatively* unstructured" concept. There is a common assumption to the effect that creativity and structure are antithetical, but in fact nothing could be more wrong-headed. There is a difference in the nature of the structure, however, namely that it must be open-ended. It must contain an invitation to completion, rather than a pre-determined end to be uncovered — not an Easter egg hunt, but a voyage of exploration. Not only so, but often the most creative outcomes eventuate as a result of building on a high degree of preparatory structure.

It is also worth pointing out that creative teaching is not necessarily linked to creative learning. The former might be employed in the service of quite convergent ends, whereas the latter must be defined in terms of the student's having arrived at his own unique destination.

In an over-all and very fundamental sense, creativity must be felt as a set of attitudes or predispositions rather than as method or strategy. Habits of mind and behaviour die hard, and yet somehow we must educate for a society whose values are changing in spite of itself. Not chauvinism alone makes one want to return to Schafer for a final comment. He is deeply concerned about the quality of the "soundscape" contemporary life has created for itself, and he describes the task of the music educator in vastly more profound and far-reaching terms than perhaps we are ready to accept. He suggests that there is a "blurring of the edges between music and environmental sounds" such that no clear distinction is possible between the "musical and non-musical kingdoms," and that

> these developments have inescapable consequences for music education. A musician used to be one who listened with seismographic delicacy in the music room, but who put on ear flaps when he left. If there is a noise pollution problem in the world today it is certainly partly and maybe largely owing to the fact that music educators have failed to give the public a total schooling in soundscape awareness . . .[8]

That is a challenge of considerable magnitude, and not one to be taken up by the faint-hearted, nor by the authoritarian curators of closed systems. 'Every man a creative artist' may be just a slogan, but 'every *teacher* a creative artist' must become a guiding principle before we can go any distance toward accepting such a challenge.

NOTES

1. W. E. Drake, *Intellectual Foundations of Modern Education* (Merrill, 1967), p. 53.
2. R. Thomas (ed.), *Synthesis* (Manhattanville Music Curriculum Project), p. 5.
3. A. N. Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (Capricorn, 1938), p. 63.
4. *Ibid.,* p. 84.
5. H. D. Aiken, "The Aesthetic Relevance of Belief," *Journal of Aesthetics,* Vol. 9, p. 305.
6. S. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (Scribner's, 1953), p. 391.
7. M. M. Vaughan, "Developing Creative Behaviour Through Music," *Canadian Music Educator,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring 1975), p. 17.
8. M. Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (McLelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 111.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Schafer, M. *Ear Cleaning, Composer in the Classroom,*
   The New Soundscape, When Words Sing (Berandol)
Paynter, J. and J. Aston. *Sound and Silence* (Cambridge U.P.)
Paynter, J. *Hear and Now* (Universal)
Dennis, B. *Experimental Music in Schools* (Oxford U.P.)
   Projects in Sound (Universal)