

Creativity in Music Education

MUSC 630 – Research in Music Education - Dr. Taryn K. Raschdorf
Partial Research Proposal
Lynne German
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore ways to develop and encourage greater levels of creativity in the music classroom, and to investigate the ways that music teachers are currently using their own creativity for teaching; to discover the tools they are using, or could be using, to stimulate student creativity, in their classroom curriculum and lesson plans; and to explore the ways that those teachers believe creativity is making a difference in their students' learning, emphasizing the value of creativity for the learner. Music teachers who are successfully and regularly using creativity in their classrooms will then be encouraged to serve as models for others.

Introduction and Nature of the Problem

Music educators, by the nature of their craft and subject matter, should be some of the most creative teachers in our schools. Yet, music teachers are often distracted by the business of music education, lobbying for student enrollment in their classes and answering the call to produce data comparable to their core teacher colleagues, rather than feeling free to provide the aesthetic education for which music was once appreciated. Stress hinders creativity, and the pressure to please parents and administrators by holding multiple stage performances during the year, and to produce students who perform well on written and performance tests, while arranging field trips and holding fundraisers, often with minimal parent support, in addition to attending a multitude of required meetings and training

sessions, can drive even the best teachers to the default mode of merely presenting facts and teaching voice or instrumental parts for the next concert, almost by rote. Attending a session or reading a book on creativity may help teachers with a short-term solution, but long-term assistance could be best achieved if teachers are mentored and given the opportunity to watch other teachers who have made creativity a way of life in their classrooms. Teachers who are already successfully employing creative technics in their classrooms need to be identified and encouraged to serve as helpful models for other teachers who could benefit from their creative thinking, planning, and activities in the music classroom. Boosting the level of creative work beyond our music classrooms could be an outcome beyond this research, and could produce a win-win scenario for the students, the music educators, and hopefully, for the school administration, as well.

The scope of the study begins with currently available information about creativity from researchers, psychologists, business leaders, and music educators, and would ultimately include data gained from a survey from and interviews with current K-12 music educators who would be willing to share the creative ideas and activities they currently use in their curriculum and lesson planning. Research results will be presented in a format that includes aspects of the creative teachers' thought processes as they plan lessons for their classes; the successful creative classroom activities and ideas they have used and can model for others; the tools they regularly use to help students grow in their creative thinking and applications in the classroom; and the differences they see in student learning when they use

creativity with their students. The underlying intended outcome is to help music educators become more intentional as creative forces in our schools to help students embark into greater creativity as a lifestyle, beginning with their music classes. The limitations of this study are the small number of participants that can be addressed and interviewed in such a large population of music teachers, and the somewhat subjective topic of creativity itself.

Research Questions

The context of this study is intended to answer four practical questions:

1) What are the characteristics of creative behaviors that can be used to develop creativity in the music classroom? 2) Who is currently modeling creativity in multiple ways in today's music classrooms, and of those teachers, who is willing to serve as models for other teachers? 3) In our current test-driven curriculums, how are music educators maintaining their own creative edge in the classroom? 4) How do music educators inspire creativity in their students, whose creative edge is often tempered by the fear of failure they experience in the SOL testing mentality?

Within the context of these questions, the larger, central question is, how does teacher creativity, and developing student creativity, make a difference in, or add value to, student learning in the classroom?

Research Review

Research on creativity is multi-faceted in its scope and application. Supporting sources can be categorized according to the following content

applications or uses: the definition of creativity; current attitudes, and how to develop new attitudes and activities to stimulate creativity; creativity as seen in business practices; creativity's impact on students and society; ideas for "chance" creative activities in the classroom; and creativity's effect on the psychology of musical performance.

Definitions:

The definitions for creativity have not seemed to change much over the years, and in many ways, most teachers use creativity every day as they adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of their students. *Abramo and Reynolds* bring this idea home as they note that highly creative teachers demonstrate an immediate responsiveness to students, leading to creative intervention in the learning process, and they continually maintain an attentiveness to student learning over the lesson plan. Creative teachers share a willingness to abandon the lesson plan to achieve positive results during the child's learning process. Flexibility, rather than closure, is the goal for a creative classroom teacher. *Ainsworth* reduces the seemingly complex idea of creativity to simply making informed decisions. His research included 16-year-old students with low intelligence who would have been school drop-outs. He was able to intervene in these students' lives with his pilot program, initiating and testing a music creativity class he hoped to see permanently added to the school curriculum. He used tunes and tonal memory to develop student listening skills and to lead the students in steps toward thoughtful choices. *Byrge and Hansen* emphasize that creativity can be learned, agreeing that no one should be

labeled as lacking creativity. Like any other skill, creativity must be modeled and practiced in the classroom. *Canfield* reminds educators that creativity is a process and not a result; if inculcated properly in the classroom, creativity is an integral part of student learning, whether it is actually recognized or not. *Webster* reminds educators that students learn by doing, and the creative process is as important as the product. His definition of creativity is demonstrated when teachers give students activities that require problem-solving skills, assigning them with tasks requiring both convergent and divergent thinking skills as they progress through the creative stages of novelty and experimentation, until finally, a useful product is attained.

Attitudes and Potential Activities

Researchers have noted an important connection between teacher attitudes toward creativity and their openness or willingness to try new things in the classroom. *Dlouhy* created a survey for undergraduate students to take, hoping the survey would drive the university's course offerings. He recognized that student attitudes affected their flexible and innovative thinking, an aspect of creativity, which further affected their ability to succeed in their advanced studies. Since this type of creativity is important to the college student's success, he hopes colleges will use his survey to identify student needs and to build student creativity by offering creativity courses or masterclasses at the university. *Kokotsaki* and *Stavrou* completed another study surveying the attitudes and insecurities of pre-service educators as it pertained to classroom creativity. Their results showed that student teachers see creativity as a by-product, rather than a goal, of education, and

sometimes avoid attempting creative ideas in the classroom for fear of failure, having never experienced and practiced creativity under their own teachers. *Kraft's* research is important and highly relevant, as it encourages teachers who might otherwise feel fearful of not “having” the gift of creativity to readjust their understanding and to give themselves time and space to discover their own creativity. His findings reveal that creativity is not related to IQ levels, nor does it require innate giftedness, but as other research has shown, it is a quality of divergent thinking that can be modeled and taught. His research also suggests that the attitudes and environment of both teacher and student can be optimized to open doors toward more creative work. The first step toward this goal is to remove barriers and preconceptions about creativity, especially the idea that creativity requires the genius capacities of only a few. Attempts to measure the “creativity quotient” by such researchers as Guilford have ended in failure; attempts like his leave too much to the discretion of the tester. Creativity is more easily determined by identifying key characteristics that are exhibited in those who excel in divergent thinking. Recognizing these characteristics is tantamount to a teacher’s understanding of how to recognize and encourage creativity in students. These key characteristics of creativity are:

*Ideational fluency: how many ideas or solutions one can devise in response to a single word;

*Variety and flexibility: the number and diversity of solutions one can find to a single problem;

*Originality: the ability to reach solutions others do not see;

*Elaboration: the ability to formulate an idea and then to move it forward into a concrete solution;

*Problem sensitivity: the ability to size down a problem, find its central challenge, and to understand its difficulties;

*Redefinition: The ability to see a known problem in a completely different manner.

This research could be incorporated into the lesson plans of music directors in numerous ways. Music educators are sometimes chided for teaching the music of dead composers, and there can be some credence to that charge, if that becomes a limitation of the class. Imagine, however, a music lesson in which, no matter what the genre of the music, music directors could be freed (for the purpose of rehearsal) away from a rut of modeling only how the music “should” sound, and could allow their creative students to suggest divergent ideas for the rest of the class, not as a mere creative exercise, but to bring new understanding and insight to the music. Admittedly, for performance, there is generally a single primary way that music from a particular genre or stylistic period should sound or be performed. However, limiting the scope of the choral reading and learning sessions to the rules for performance only encourages and confirms convergent thinking, for which there can be only one solution. In contrast, teachers could open up the classroom to divergent thinking by challenging students to explore the many “what-ifs” that the original composer himself or herself addressed in the composition process. For

instance, consider questions that a teacher could ask the class about a given piece of repertoire, in this instance, Graham and Loveland's song, "You Raise Me Up":

*What big ideas come to mind when you sing the word "hunger" in
(Ideational fluency);

*In how many ways would the piece be different if it ended on the
subdominant chord? (Variety and flexibility);

*Would this piece be more powerful with choreography? If so, what motions
would you use for the word, "strong", and what motions would lead up to that word?
(Originality)

*If we created a drone with the basses and tenors instead of a piano
introduction to represent human frailties and daily struggles in this song, in which
measures would you repeat the drone, and how could you use it at the end of the
piece to restate your idea? (Elaboration);

*What is the most difficult task we have to master in this piece? How will we
best meet that challenge? (Problem sensitivity);

*In Bradley Knight's arrangement of this piece, you liked the alternate ending
better than the first. Is your reason because of the sound of the final chord in the
first version, with sopranos on the high Ab and all the parts in multiple divisi, or is it
because you prefer the more intimate alternate ending for the message of this piece?
(Redefinition)

Rerouting thinking is the beginning of creativity. Kraft suggests that our
creativity is gradually suppressed, from the time we are children who can turn a

blanket and yardstick into a medieval fortress, to the time we become adolescents who are fearful of sharing original ideas. Tests during the school years and then job placements after that take precedence over original ideas and imagination, and the left brain gradually begins to overshadow the right brain. Creativity involves the entire brain, allowing the left brain to take in and process stated ideas, and the right brain to develop and then filter ideas into further or additional usefulness. The openness of both sides of the brain, working in tandem, is the best use of our energies for problem solving.

When open possibilities are introduced to the class, the process of experimentation comes to the forefront first and then later leads to determinations of usefulness for the emerging ideas. Divergent thinking in an exercise in the music classroom is not always intended to become a final destiny, but simply an experiment that leads to greater musical understanding. A music director might ask the class, "What if the composer began this piece with measure 33, stopped five bars before the current end of the piece, and instead of using the ending written, finished the song with the piano introduction?" The end-result of this experiment would most likely not be a great new way to organize and perform the piece, but it can lead to a renewed appreciation from the students that the composer had many choices, and that he or she did not, in fact, make the choices used for that experiment. Discussions could then follow as to why the composer made the choices as he or she did in the piece. Working through such a process of divergent thinking, if only for a few minutes during a rehearsal, can open up students' understanding to perform the piece with a deeper understanding of the composer's intentions and to begin their

own curiosity and set of questions, leading to more divergent thinking practices throughout rehearsal sessions. Any teacher can run experiments like this to develop divergent thinking in students, leading them see that there could be more than one correct answer (or not); the composer simply chose to select one of many available options. In addition, Kraft's research observed that people with dementia have the ability to suddenly become quite creative. No longer afraid of outcomes or of what people think, they have arrived at an uninhibited place where they are able to freely process new options without hesitation. Artists with dementia have been known to produce more dramatic works; those who have never had a lesson in composition can even sometimes compose music on their own. Vincent Van Gogh, in the last two years before his death (1888-1890) produced many of his most famous pieces. These facts lend credence to the belief that the greatest incapacity for creativity is not a lack of ability, but rather the fear of failure or of "not doing it right." Kraft also notes that creative breakthroughs are not achieved without convergent thinking. Creative people actually become more creative when they are already grounded in a solid set of knowledge, or facts, about a topic. Creative people often connect ideas that others might dismiss as having no common denominator. Still, to connect the ideas, the creative person needs to possess some previous working knowledge of the idea at hand. On the other hand, too much specialized knowledge can actually stand in the way of unconventional, creative alternative solutions to any given problem. Mathematicians can be hindered in the creative arena, since they are usually in the practice of holding to absolute solutions, which may hinder them from

considering new pathways. Patience with odd experiments, through the bumps of trial and error, is required for the messy and unpredictable creative process.

Finally, creative people can see ideas and solutions while engaged in unrelated activities. Archimedes stepped into the bathtub when he became aware of the theory of fluid displacement. Through a mindset of openness, curiosity, and attention, the creative person finds unrelated activities leading them to new ideas, or to the solutions of problems that their brains have been working on in the background. All work and no play can inhibit or corrupt creativity.

The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking presents subjects with shapes and requests that they use them or combine them to form a picture or partial picture. Training and encouragement can bring anyone to better results in a test such as this. Teachers desiring to develop more creativity in their students could incorporate brief activities like this in their classroom lessons. A music teacher could use this idea, substituting pictures for the shapes in the original test, which could be used to represent songs. They could also present sections of songs and ask the students to combine them in unique ways. This is another opportunity for the process of divergent thinking that may rarely conclude with a usable product; but a practice of such divergent thinking in students will lead them to the ability think more creatively, and ultimately, at some point, to reach a final product with their own creative ideas. If we dismiss the initial creative process as useless because it may fail to produce a product, creative thinking will cease to be encouraged and practiced.

The Business Model

Research confirms that many new teachers' attitudes tend to limit creativity to certain activities, such as composing a song or painting a picture. *Lehrer* is a good source for teachers as he moves away from this faulty idea, and seeks to understand and encourage creativity from the business perspective. Following the practices of highly creative companies, he debunks current trends such as brainstorming, and recommends daydreaming, changing partners, and using the color blue to double creativity. His research in the business domain can help music teachers try new ideas to stimulate musical creativity, and avoid the pitfalls of limiting creativity to specific activities such as composing or improvising.

Impact

Researchers from the United Kingdom have been looking for the impact that creativity has on students after graduation; during the early part of this century, the British wanted their educational system to be impactful on their society. *J. T. Humphreys* delves into the cultural, political, social, and economics portions of society that he sees positively impacted by students who learn to be creative during their school years. With this understanding, developing creativity in students becomes much bolder and more significant than simply providing additional activities within a classroom; teachers who help students develop their creativity are actually positively impacting the society that will be formed by their graduating students.

“Chance” Creative Activities

Brown's piece is helpful for teachers wishing to begin creative musical activities in the classroom. He suggests that groups work better than individuals for stimulating creativity, and he also outlines a couple of no-fail creative activities, based on determining factors. In one activity, he uses the rolling of dice or the use of a calculator to determine which musical phrase is next; as the phrases are then linked together, a piece is created through chance phrasing. *Challis* suggests digital activities with specialized tools for students with visual impairments to encourage creativity uninhibited by their impairment. *Feinstein* offers a broader understanding of creative activities in the classroom, beginning with a “field” that participants join. The participants of each field are then tasked to solve particular problems together. Each activity relies on modeling, along with an agreement that in creative development, success is not guaranteed, so failure is not to be feared. Field members work through a process of responding to ideas to generate new combinations of feasibilities. *A. Humphreys* reminds his readers that creativity can be lost if the teacher only teaches old literature to students; variety is needed to stimulate curiosity. *Javore* purports that the “non-formal” classroom is a successful catalyst for creativity. This classroom setting is student-oriented, with curriculum arising as the students are presented with short-term experiences, to which they respond with mind, body, and spirit. She promotes relationships and positive growth as both a pre-requisite and also as a by-product of creativity in learning. *Odena* is more specific, and recommends songwriting activities in the classroom through the use of digital imagery, video games, and other online sites. She also

considers music therapy as a creative music activity. She gives examples of Brazilian adolescent composition activities to stimulate creative ideas in the participants.

Psychology

Of high importance to music directors is the data that researchers have uncovered relating creativity to the psychology of successful music performances. *An and Carr* note two important components that teachers need to know about creativity in the classroom and in performance. First, personality and IQ tend to predict divergent thinking and domain-specific knowledge in the student. Secondly, motivation is the predictor for creative expert performance. The unmotivated student learns the difficult piece but is soon done with it; the creativity required for the highest level of musicality in performance can only arise with higher student motivation. Thus, without creativity and motivation, students may be stuck with less-than stellar performances, and may not reach their musical potential. *Roher's* work is a book review of Parncutt & McPherson's book, discussing how and why people learn cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills at various levels. Included in this research is the connection between the student's personal and environmental factors and student creativity, an important connection for music teachers in diverse, cultural classrooms. Sub skills of music performance and musical potential are also addressed. Music teachers who work with disadvantaged students understand that an underlying psychology leading to performance failure may arise

in these students. Releasing creativity may help these students forget their inhibitions and lead them to more motivation and a higher performance level.

Tan provides invaluable research findings and ideas for boosting musical creativity in music educators. In the Preface to *Tan's* book (p. xxi), Thomas B. Ward . reiterates the concept that a basic level of knowledge and intellectual understanding is required in the student before creativity can find its full potential. He summarizes: "Thus, in the bigger picture, developing engaging lessons might contribute to a child's appreciation, or even love of a topic, modeling creative thinking styles could conceivably boost the development of similar styles of in children, and providing a tolerant classroom atmosphere might encourage even students with risk-averse personalities to come out a bit more, but potentially more progress can be made by educators by a focus on the components of knowledge and intellectual skills."

Further Research Needed

Most researchers and educators from the 1950's to the present agree on what creativity is, and how important the process is, over the product. All seem to agree that creativity must be modeled, taught, and practiced. Most agree that the climate of the learning space must include freedom to make mistakes, so that creativity can be nurtured and grow without fear of failure. At least one researcher has extrapolated its importance in education to include the ways creative students impact their society after graduation. A few researchers and educators have made general connections to the use of creativity in the classroom, and some have

addressed and suggested more specific creative activities to use. More recently, research and articles are a bit more difficult to find, although general education sites are bringing to the forefront specific creative activities related to core subjects that require SOL testing. Since the basic definition and outworking of creativity is not subject to change, further study of creativity itself may not be warranted. However, as society continues to change at a rapid pace, methodologies for using and developing creative thinking in learners are always changing. Creative educators and business people could help immensely by publishing their findings as they discover new and better ways to develop creativity in their classrooms or in their development teams in the workplace. Teachers who are currently modeling highly creative thinking and activities in their classrooms can be interviewed and staged as models for others. Students can be interviewed and followed in longitudinal studies to determine how their creativity is inspired and nurtured to higher levels of thinking and problem solving in the classrooms, and later, how their adeptness at creativity assisted them after graduation. Research can be done to compare student achievement (all other things being as equal as possible) between those who participated in highly creative versus moderately creative classroom settings. The purpose of this research project is to begin with the current understanding about creativity in general; to find music teachers who are successfully and regularly developing creativity in their students; and to encourage those teachers to serve as models for other teachers, to arouse higher levels of intentional creative thinking and lesson planning in music teachers.

Procedures: Preliminary Methodology

Data Collection: Create a Sample

1. Apply for permission from ODU to distribute the survey questionnaire.
2. Contact Merry Beth Hall, Editor of VMEA Notes Magazine, asking for permission to advertise an invitation to teachers to participate in the survey. vmeanotesed@gmail.com
3. Contact Virginia District II music teachers, asking them to participate in the survey.
4. Respondents will be asked to answer via email.
5. Once contacts have been made, respondents will be emailed the questionnaire below, and will be asked permission to be called later for a phone interview, reviewing and clarifying their answers to the questions. At least three and no more than twelve respondents will be considered for the actual research project. Respondents will be asked for permission to tape the interview, for later reference, and will be asked for permission to be quoted in the final statements. Respondents will be asked if they would be willing to videotape and submit a creative activity in their classrooms and/or present a session with me for a VMEA

conference during which they would present that activity to the conference attendees, allowing them to become participants.

Survey and Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching music?
2. What factors contributed to your decision to be a music teacher?
3. How did you determine the grade level(s) you wanted to teach?
4. What is your philosophy for teaching music?
5. How would you define creativity in music education?
6. As you create your lesson plans, how do you include creativity in your goals and activities?
7. What specific strategies do you commonly use to foster creativity?
8. Describe two of your best, or most successful, applications of creativity in your music classroom.
9. Please select which of these you currently employ in your classroom as creative components to your lessons (check all that apply):
 - a. multiple adaptations for special learners;
 - b. the use of multiple ways to present ideas in music theory, reading, or musicianship;
 - c. specific games or activities to spawn creativity, such as, but not limited to composing, improvising, creative games;
 - d. creative student group sessions for problem solving;

- e. giving students opportunities to create alternate introductions or endings to songs in their repertoire;
 - f. asking students to create alternate stories or lyrics to songs in their repertoire that allow the music to come to life for them during rehearsal;
 - g. dressing in historic costume or engaging in story-telling that opens up creativity in students' awareness of music history;
 - h. assigning students presentations for a music history or theory lesson that require creativity.
10. Think your comfort level with creativity in your classroom. Would you be willing to serve as a model for other music teachers, demonstrating the ideas that are most successful for you?
11. Consider your normal thought processing as you plan a creative lesson or presentation for your class. List questions that you seek to answer as you plan.
12. List ideas that you have used to help students overcome fear or apprehension so that they can operate with more freedom and creativity in your classroom. Include your most successful means of establishing an open, warm, and forgiving (failure is an OK part of the process) classroom climate.
13. Describe an activity that you would use or have used to incorporate each of these cognitive/creative processes with your students:
- a. Ideational fluency: how many ideas or solutions one can devise in response to a single word;

- b. Variety and flexibility: the number and diversity of solutions one can find to a single problem;
- c. Originality: the ability to reach solutions others do not see;
- d. Elaboration: the ability to formulate an idea and then to move it forward into a concrete solution;
- e. Problem sensitivity: the ability to size down a problem, find its central challenge, and to understand its difficulties.
- f. Redefinition: The ability to see a known problem in a completely different manner.

14. How has the use of creativity made a difference, or added value, in your classroom?

Data Assessment and Discussion:

1. Survey results from the teacher questionnaire and interviews will be tabulated into categories, beginning with the thought processes of the teachers, followed by the ideas they use to develop these previously listed creative characteristic behaviors in their students:
 - a. *Ideational fluency: how many ideas or solutions one can devise in response to a single word;
 - b. *Variety and flexibility: the number and diversity of solutions one can find to a single problem;

- c. *Originality: the ability to reach solutions others do not see;
 - d. *Elaboration: the ability to formulate an idea and then to move it forward into a concrete solution;
 - e. *Problem sensitivity: the ability to size down a problem, find its central challenge, and to understand its difficulties;
 - f. *Redefinition: The ability to see a known problem in a completely different manner.
2. Comparisons will be made between the apparent level of freedom and creativity of the teacher and his or her philosophy of teaching music (answer to question #4) and definition of creativity (answer to question #5) to see if there is any obvious correlation.
 3. The central question will be asked both at the beginning and at the end of each interview, and will be included in the results: "How has creativity made a difference for your students in your classroom, or added value to student learning?" This question will be of ultimate importance. The hypothesis is that the use of creativity in music teachers' classrooms makes a big difference in the students' achievements and motivation, both inside and outside the music classroom.

Conclusion:

The survey and interview results and discussion from the sampling of teachers should reinforce a value level for creativity in the classroom; develop a constituency of teachers who would be willing to demonstrate and model creativity in the classroom for others; and provide an encouragement for music teachers to

more fully, intentionally, and confidently engage in creative activities in their classrooms that can help develop divergent thinking, enhancing their students' learning in and outside of the music classroom.

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