Musicianship in education: ideology and practice

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Abstract

Everyone is musical and has the potential to be a musician (Mills, 2005; Welch, 2008). Are secondary school teachers simply acquainting young people with a selection of musical experiences or do they seek to plan a curriculum which will enable developing musicians? This paper outlines a part of ongoing doctoral studies and reports on some of the initial data exploring the musical competencies considered to be central to the development of musicians and how far, in actuality, these competencies are central to school musical activities. It describes sorting activities (ranking musical competencies) undertaken by the participants (n = 34) and the activity evident in a small sample of case-study music lessons.

Keywords: musician; musicianship; competency; biography; ranking.

Introduction

It has been argued elsewhere (Dalladay, 2011b) that, while there is some contention as to what it means to be musical and the nature of musicianship, and despite Mills's (2005) assertion that there is no such thing as a 'non-musician', it does seem to be apparent that 'everyone has the capacity to be musical but it is only through participation, training and progression that one attains the goal of becoming a musician' (Dalladay, 2011b; also Kemp, 1996) – the former being a stepping stone to the latter. This earlier paper asked the question of what a music teacher's role is: to simply acquaint young people with some aspects and practices in music – to give them an experience of music – or to seek to develop young musicians (Dalladay, 2011b)? Wright (2012), too, has asked whether 'emphasis upon "musical understanding", academic knowledge *about* music [is] the goal of music education' (Wright, 2012: 30).

This current paper, seeks to go a little further to explore what secondary music teachers in England (specifically, east London) and student teachers on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses believe to be important competencies in the development of the young musician and how far this 'translates' into practice in the classroom. It forms part of ongoing doctoral research into the biographies of music teachers, their understanding of musicality and its implication in secondary music education. Some earlier findings from this research into the nature of teachers' understanding of musicality have been described in volume 1, issue 1 of this journal (Dalladay, 2011a).

Musical competencies

Examining the traits of well-known musicians suggests three possible factors concerning the musician and musicianship:

(1) That musicians develop the ability to 'internalise' sound; not simply physically experiencing it via the ears. Evelyn Glennie (2003), the profoundly deaf percussionist, would go further by suggesting that we allow our whole body to experience the 'life' and 'journey' of the sound (Glennie, 2003);

(2) That musicians frequently desire to devise music, not just to perform it; it is often an important part of one's engagement with the art form (whether through composing or improvising). Rousseau states that 'to understand music, it is not sufficient to be able to play or sing; we must learn to compose at the same time, or we shall never be masters of this science' (Rousseau, 1779: 251);

(3) That musicians are able to go beyond the realm of technique and the 'science' or 'mathematics' of music and into the emotional and expressive effect. It was partly an over-emphasis on technical competence over musical understanding that Ofsted criticised in its 2009 report into music in English schools (Ofsted, 2009: 23).

A number of music educationalists have gone further in attempting to identify those skills and abilities possessed by musicians. Pflederer (1963) highlights seven characteristics of musicianship (Pflederer refers here, in fact, to musicality):

• possessing a musical ear
• the ability to coordinate melodic and associated sound stimuli through the musical ear
• searching out coherent melodic and harmonic meanings, not satisfied with passively bathing in the sensuous colours of sound
• finding delight in experiencing music as an integrated whole
• coordinating the sound impressions by reducing them to their simplest relationships in an attempt to clarify the formal structure
• awareness of and response to stylistic differences in formal structure and tonal relationships to be anticipated in music of different epochs
• ability to identify and respond to the expressive quality embodied in music which is communicated through the movement of the musical impulses within the total gesture.

These can provide us with a useful starting point, and many other writers include at least some of the same characteristics (eg Hallam, 2006). It is interesting to note that Pflederer also places a hierarchy upon the roles a musician may take which is supported by the composer John Cage (1978), who states:

> 'It is better to make a piece of music than perform one, better to perform one than to listen to one, better to listen to one than misuse it as a means of distraction, entertainment, or acquisition of "culture"' (Cage, 1978: 64).

Considering these points and others has led, for the purposes of the current research, to the identification of 12 competencies of musicians (in no particular sequence):

1. The ability to perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique. Rogers, 2002; Hargreaves *at al*, 2002; Lamont, 2002; Fletcher, 1989; Müllensiefen, 2011; MENC, 1994

2. The ability to develop original, imaginative compositions. Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Swanwick, 1988; Hargreaves, 1986; Rousseau, 1779; Paynter,1982

3. The ability to improvise with confidence. Paynter, 1982; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Thompson & Lehmann, 2004; MENC, 1994

4. The ability to use musical terminology in appraising music. Pflederer, 1963: 52; MENC, 1994

5. The ability to read from staff notation fluently. Maxwell-Davies *in* Ward, 2007; MENC, 1994

6. The ability to sing with accurate intonation. Welch, 2006; Hallam, 2006; MENC, 1994

7. The ability to use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events'.Wise *et al*, 2011; Kemp, 1986

8. The ability to perform music 'by ear'. Pflederer, 1963; Glennie, 2003; Green, 2002

9. The ability to harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions. Swanwick & Tillman, 1986

10. A general knowledge of a range of music from different times, traditions and cultures.Pflederer, 1963; Rogers, 2009; MENC 1994

11. The ability to discuss, write and/or draw about the expressive content of music. Hallam, 2006; Pflederer, 1963; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; MENC, 1994

12. The ability to aurally analyse the relationships between sounds. Paynter *in* Mills & Paynter, 2008: 80; Bentley *in* Hallam, 2006; Hallam, 2006; Gordon, 1997

It is recognised, of course, that musicians are not necessarily expected to have *all* of these traits but may well have a significant number. This list is remarkably similar to that laid down in the National Standards for Arts Education (MENC, 1994; Jaffurs, 2004: 6) in the USA and, in turn, they also feature quite strongly in the National Curriculum Orders for Music in England (QCA, 2007). This list forms the crux of the research described in the next section.

Research: sorting activity

The 12 musical competencies were presented as a 'sorting activity' (see Fig. 1) to experienced secondary music teachers and student teachers (*n* = 34) from an east London ITE partnership who were asked to rank the competency from highest priority (1st position) to lowest (12th position).

Figure 1 Sorting activity: musical competencies in developing musicianship

In your view, what competencies are the most important in developing musicianship?

Please rate these competencies in order, from most important to least by placing a '1' in the most important down to '12' for the least important. If you feel that some are of equal importance, give them the same number.

There are some empty rows at the bottom for you to add any competencies you think may be missing (you do not have to fill them in).

Competency	Ranking	Justification / Notes (optional)
Ability to perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique		
Ability to develop original, imaginative compositions		
Ability to improvise with confidence		
Ability to use musical terminology in appraising music		
Ability to read from staff notation fluently		
Ability to sing with accurate intonation		
Ability to use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events'		
Ability to perform music 'by ear'		
Ability to harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions		
Has a general knowledge of a range of music from different times, traditions and cultures		
Ability to discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music		
Ability to aurally analyse the relationships between sounds		

As well as individual results from the teachers and students, a mean ranking has been calculated which suggests the following order of importance for the musical competencies (Table 1 below):

Table 1
Mean ranking results from the sorting activity and ranking of result

Mean ranking
(where 1=high)

Rank	
Ability to perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique 3.3	**1**
Ability to sing with accurate intonation 3.7	**2**
Ability to perform music 'by ear' 4.1	**3**
Ability to aurally analyse the relationships between sounds 4.1	**3**
Ability to develop original, imaginative compositions 4.7	**5**
Ability to improvise with confidence 5.3	**6**
Has a general knowledge of a range of music from different times, traditions and cultures 5.7	**7**
Ability to discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music 5.4	**8**
Ability to read from staff notation fluently 6.1	**9**
Ability to harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions 7.5	**10**
Ability to use musical terminology when appraising music 7.5	**10**
Ability to use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events' 8.2	**12**

It is perhaps interesting to note at this point that, while singing is universally thought of as an important competency for musicians (2nd position in the mean ranking table at Table 1 above), the most recent report from Ofsted (2012) on the 'state' of music education in England reported that 'singing was inadequate – or simply not happening at all – in 41 of the 90 schools inspected' (Ofsted, 2012: 31).

Research: observation of practice

The second stage of the research has involved the observation of music teaching across a small sample of case studies (n = 7 so far). The competencies – along with a further 'sorting activity' which related to learning contexts for musical development – formed the basis of the observation and this was 'plotted' along with a timeline on an observation schedule to be found at Figure 2.

In this observation schedule, where an activity is observed which relates to one of the competencies, this is plotted on the timeline at the bottom and a 'score' of 1–3 is noted in the final right-hand column of the sheet against the following criteria:

1. Evident in the lesson but not a major feature.

   For example, the corresponding activity is short and/or cursory.

2. Evident in the lesson with a degree of significance but the competency is not fully 'met'; eg pupils sing but with little accuracy of intonation or emphasis on its improvement.

3. The competency is fully evident in the lesson.

The mean results for this across the sample of lessons observed are detailed in Table 2. These are listed from most observed to least.

Table 2
Mean observed musical competencies and ranking

Mean observed
Significance 1-3

Rank	
Ability to perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique 2.1	**1**
Ability to use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events' 1.9	**2**
Has a general knowledge of a range of music from different times, traditions and cultures 1.3	**3**
Ability to develop original, imaginative compositions 1.1	**4**
Ability to perform music 'by ear' 1.0	**5**
Ability to use musical terminology when appraising music 1.0	**5**
Ability to sing with accurate intonation 0.4	**7**
Ability to aurally analyse the relationships between sounds 0.4	**7**
Ability to read from staff notation fluently 0.3	**9**
Ability to discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music 0.1	**10**
Ability to improvise with confidence 0.1	**10**
Ability to harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions 0.0	**12**

Figure 2
Musicianship in music teaching practice: observation schedule

Musicianship in music teaching practice: Observation Schedule

Date:		Practitioner:		Class/Group:		Theme:		Observer:		Seen[2]	Score[3]
Rank[1]	Aspect (code for use in timeline)					Notes					
	Competencies key to the development of musicianship										
3.3	(a) pupils perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique										
3.7	(b) pupils sing with accurate intonation										
4.1	(c) pupils perform music by ear										
4.1	(d) pupils aurally analyse relationships between sounds										
4.7	(e) pupils develop original, imaginative compositions										
5.3	(f) pupils improvise with confidence										
5.4	(g) pupils discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music										
5.7	(h) pupils develop general knowledge of a range of music across time, trad. & culture										
6.1	(k) pupils read from staff notation fluently										
7.5	(l) pupils harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions										
7.5	(m) pupils use musical terminology in appraising music										
8.2	(n) pupils use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events'										
	Learning contexts key to the development of musicianship										
4.0	(a) Learning is supported by a teacher - classroom or instrument										
4.2	(b) pupils perform with others										
4.9	(c) there is the opportunity for regular practice										
5.0	(d) pupils learn from role models / other stiimulating musicians										
5.1	(e) pupils listen to recorded music										
5.6	(f) learning is supported from/by friends										
5.6	(g) there is an opporunity to witness live musical performance(s)										
5.8	(h) pupils have the opportunity to perform to an audience										
5.9	(k) pupils have the opportunity to jam/improvise										
6.7	(l) pupils have the opporunity to teach others										
7.0	(m) pupils have the opportunity to compose										
7.4	(n) there is the opportunity to learn music through academic study										

TIMELINE   0 ' ' ' ' 5 ' ' ' ' 10 ' ' ' ' 15 ' ' ' ' 20 ' ' ' ' 25 ' ' ' ' 30 ' ' ' ' 35 ' ' ' ' 40 ' ' ' ' 45 ' ' ' ' 50 ' ' ' ' 55 ' ' ' ' 60 ' ' ' ' 65 ' ' ' ' 70

Competencies

Contexts

(1) Mean ranking from sorting research activity (n=34)   (2) tick if competency or context is evident in lesson   (3) score out of 3: 1=minor feature, 2=noted feature but not fully met, 3=fully evident and met

C.G.Dalladay, 2012

Analysis of data

Perhaps the clearest result of comparing the data in Table 1 (beliefs of what is important in developing musicianship) and in Table 2 (what aspects of musical competency are actually taught in the classroom) is that most participants believe that the most important competency for musicianship is to be able to develop instrumental performance skills, and it is the development of instrumental skills which is the most often observed in lessons. It is to be noted, though, that in six of the seven case studies, the instruments in use were electric keyboards; the seventh being guitar.

Also notable in the analysis of data is that, while many considered the use of ICT in music education to be least important in developing musicianship (ranked 12th), ICT is placed in 2nd position in ranking the competencies observed in practice. In two of these lessons, the teaching room was laid out as a computer studio with 'mother' keyboards at each workstation, and composing activity was carried out by pupils working at the computer using a software sequencer.

Also, in both cases, while the students played their keyboards in order to input their music to the sequencer, there was no 'live' performance of the resulting compositions: 'performances' of compositions were by playback from the sequencer.

Of those lessons observed which included performance on a musical instrument – six of the seven – just 50% received an observation 'score' of 3 because any reference to developing technique (eg fingering) was not covered in the lesson. In the remaining lessons, keyboards were made significant use of but as a tool for inputting music into the software sequencers and with no reference to performance technique.

Some of the comparisons of the two sets of data in Tables 1 and 2 are summed up in the graph in Figure 3. In this graph, a straight black line has been superimposed to indicate what one might expect to be the trend.

Figure 3
Graph to show the relationship between perceived importances of musical competencies against observed significance in practice
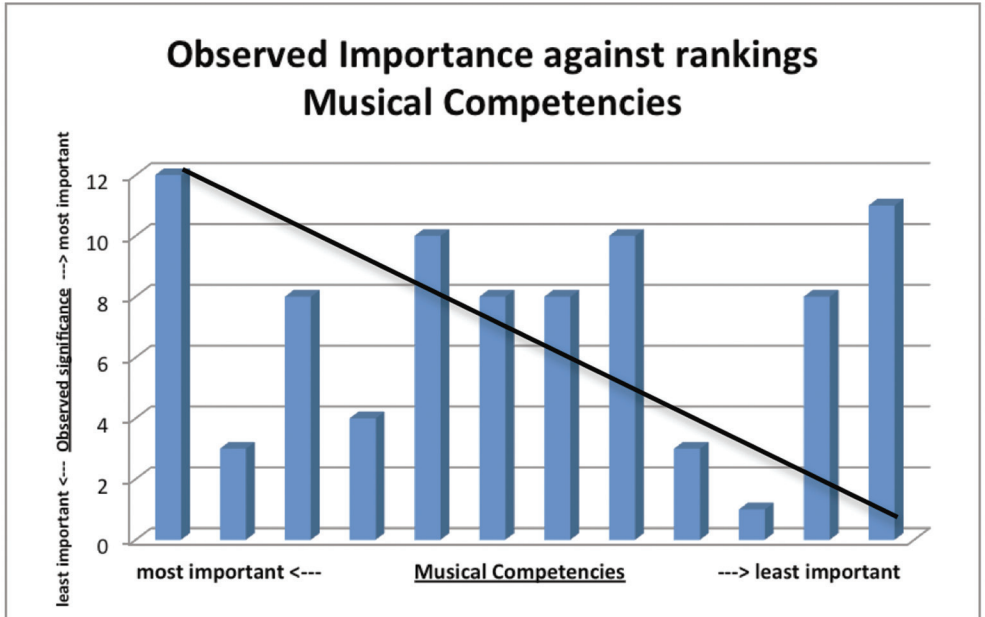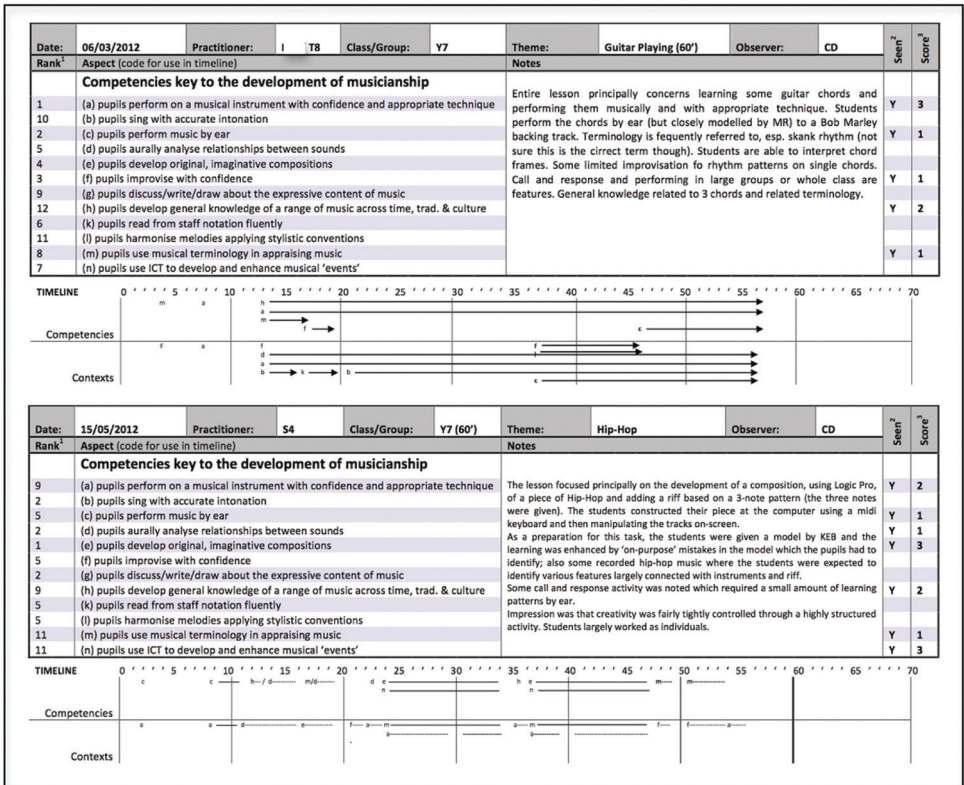

Let us consider two of the case studies in a little more detail. The two selected here provide contrast, as one was a lesson that was largely about developing performance skills on the guitar (subject T8) and the other centred on composing (subject S4) (see Figure 4). As we consider these, a number of observations can be noted, three of which, as a small sample, might include the following:

• While a number of musical competencies are covered in lessons with teachers seeking to raise pupil achievement as musicians, very few are fully covered. In the lesson from T8, pupils are encouraged to develop significant technique and confidence in playing guitar; in that from S4, pupils are encouraged to develop original compositions using a software sequencer on a computer. The latter has the benefit that the sequencer enables some structuring and scaffolding of the composing process.

• T8 ranks singing comparatively low in importance as a competence (10th) relative to the overall view of the sample (2nd; mean ranking 3.7). Instead, this teacher attaches high importance to the skill of performing by ear. It is interesting to note that, in an interview following this lesson observation, T8's own background in jazz and popular music involved a lot of learning by ear and improvisation (which he ranks in 3rd position).

• S4 ranks using ICT to 'develop and enhance musical events' in 11th position in terms of importance but makes significant use of it to develop composing activity in the lesson. Again, it is interesting to note that S4's (a trainee teacher) ranking was completed at the beginning of training; and the same sorting activity was repeated at the end of training when they ranked this competency a little higher, in 8th position. When challenged on this point in interview, S4 remarked that, as a trainee teacher, they have less freedom over the lesson content and approach; that the 'way of working' adopted by the school's music department is also adopted fairly closely by the trainee whether they feel comfortable with this or not.

Figure 4
Observation schedules for Case Studies T8 and S4

Date:	06/03/2012	Practitioner:	I	T8	Class/Group:	Y7		Theme:	Guitar Playing (60')	Observer:	CD	Seen[2]	Score[3]
Rank[1]	Aspect (code for use in timeline)							Notes					

Rank	Competencies key to the development of musicianship	Seen	Score
1	(a) pupils perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique	Y	3
10	(b) pupils sing with accurate intonation		
2	(c) pupils perform music by ear	Y	1
5	(d) pupils aurally analyse relationships between sounds		
4	(e) pupils develop original, imaginative compositions		
3	(f) pupils improvise with confidence	Y	1
9	(g) pupils discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music		
12	(h) pupils develop general knowledge of a range of music across time, trad. & culture	Y	2
6	(k) pupils read from staff notation fluently		
11	(l) pupils harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions		
8	(m) pupils use musical terminology in appraising music	Y	1
7	(n) pupils use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events'		

Notes: Entire lesson principally concerns learning some guitar chords and performing them musically and with appropriate technique. Students perform the chords by ear (but closely modelled by MR) to a Bob Marley backing track. Terminology is fequently referred to, esp. skank rhythm (not sure this is the cirrect term though). Students are able to interpret chord frames. Some limited improvisation fo rhythm patterns on single chords. Call and response and performing in large groups or whole class are features. General knowledge related to 3 chords and related terminology.

Date:	15/05/2012	Practitioner:	S4		Class/Group:	Y7 (60')	Theme:	Hip-Hop	Observer:	CD	Seen[2]	Score[3]
Rank[1]	Aspect (code for use in timeline)						Notes					

Rank	Competencies key to the development of musicianship	Seen	Score
9	(a) pupils perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique	Y	2
2	(b) pupils sing with accurate intonation		
5	(c) pupils perform music by ear	Y	1
2	(d) pupils aurally analyse relationships between sounds	Y	1
1	(e) pupils develop original, imaginative compositions	Y	3
5	(f) pupils improvise with confidence		
2	(g) pupils discuss/write/draw about the expressive content of music		
9	(h) pupils develop general knowledge of a range of music across time, trad. & culture	Y	2
5	(k) pupils read from staff notation fluently		
5	(l) pupils harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions		
11	(m) pupils use musical terminology in appraising music	Y	1
11	(n) pupils use ICT to develop and enhance musical 'events'	Y	3

Notes: The lesson focused principally on the development of a composition, using Logic Pro, of a piece of Hip-Hop and adding a riff based on a 3-note pattern (the three notes were given). The students constructed their piece at the computer using a midi keyboard and then manipulating the tracks on-screen.
As a preparation for this task, the students were given a model by KEB and the learning was enhanced by 'on-purpose' mistakes in the model which the pupils had to identify; also some recorded hip-hop music where the students were expected to identify various features largely connected with instruments and riff.
Some call and response activity was noted which required a small amount of learning patterns by ear.
Impression was that creativity was fairly tightly controlled through a highly structured activity. Students largely worked as individuals.

Discussion

In its 2009 report, Ofsted suggested that 'the work [in school music lessons] tended to focus on developing the students' technical competence without enough consideration of the quality of their musical response and the depth of musical understanding' (Ofsted, 2009: 23). The data produced from the 'sorting activity' described in the previous sections would suggest that teachers and trainees rate highly those musical competencies which involve a direct and personal engagement with sound as the raw material of music (instrumental performance, singing, composing, aural awareness, learning by ear, improvisation). However, in practice, in the classroom, with the exception of instrumental performance, these same competencies are less evident or not developed in depth.

While the sample in this research is small, it does perhaps suggest that music teachers are occupied in presenting their pupils with an experience of music – playing a musical instrument, acquaintance with some of the principles of composition, an increasing memory of musical terminology and general knowledge – rather than in supporting a genuine, in-depth development of musical understanding and musicianship where the competencies required for the development of musicians are all covered in depth in a school curriculum.

There may be a number of reasons for this:

• The pressures of the curriculum – time, space, class sizes, resources

• The requirements of policy and assessment – internal and external to the school. There may be conflicts between our own ideologies as experts in our field and the practicalities of the workplace (Kemp, 1996; Beck & Young, 2005)

• The teachers' own background and philosophy – upbringing, education, musical experiences, interests and skills. We are products of our own biography (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Schlaug, 2003; Entwistle, 2007)

• The expectations and needs of the pupils – ambitions, home pressures, peer groups. The expectations and interests of our students may be 'out of line' with our own as educators (Welch et al., 2011)

Wright (2012) asks some pertinent rhetorical questions in relation to some of these points:

> *'Is emphasis upon "musical understanding", academic knowledge about music the goal of music education? Or is such emphasis an assault upon the potential inclusive and socially transformative power of music education? Do we need to teach and learn all subjects in the same way? Do we need pedagogic strategies to help us deliver the pre-packaged learning goods required by our governments, or is some pedagogic autonomy more beneficial to the healthy musical growth of our students?' (Wright, 2012: 30)*

Musicians participate in *active* music making (Kemp, 1996). This is echoed in the words of the comedian and polymath Stephen Fry, when he has said that 'we are not nouns, we are verbs. I am not a thing – an actor, a writer – I am a person who does things – I write, I act... I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun' (Fry, 2010). In the lessons observed outlined above and through the personal philosophies and beliefs of the teachers concerned, the pupils of a music class are, generally, highly engaged in musical activity and they are frequently motivated. However, it is possible that only part of 'the story' is present, for, as Philpott (2012) suggests, the 'complete discourse is either absent or relatively immature' (that relating to 'what is music?', 'how is meaning constructed in music?', 'what does it mean to understand music?', etc) in favour of measurable outcomes, transferability potential of musical skills, the impact on a child's development and wellbeing (Philpott, 2012: 52–3).

Conclusion

It is important for all involved in music education – teachers, school governors, music leaders and politicians – to be clear and unequivocal about what the purpose of a musical education is for the pupils who participate in it. Is it that children and young people have an acquaintance with music and some practical understanding of its components, elements and working; or is it to contribute towards the development of the musicians of the future? The vast majority of professional musicians have developed their musicianship through additional tuition outside school and attendance at out-of-class ensembles. Professional music is still perceived as rather elitist and largely the preserve of those with some financial wherewithal – with the sometime exception of the popular music genres. Wright (2012) sums up this view when she suggests that music 'can be inclusive until you want to be taken seriously in it' (Wright, 2012: 29).

The cynical view might be that, until Philpott's 'complete discourse' (2012: 52) is acknowledged and serious musical activity and development is truly inclusive for all (Wright, 2012), the function of school curricular music will rarely serve the role of developing musicians. A more optimistic view might be that many teachers are seeking to instil the sort of competencies required of developing musicians in their teaching, and young people are, through practical engagement with music, undertaking some of the 'groundwork' necessary to subsequent development as musicians if they choose to go further at a later stage in their education.

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