

# CREATIVITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper aims at 1) defining, first of all, the definitions of creativity in the field of psychology and music education; 2) establishing the value of creativity in music education; 3) exploring the conditions in nurturing creativity in education; 4) examining the musical practices in twentieth century and its influences on school music curriculum, and last but not the least; 5) distinguishing the differences between creative music making and creative music teaching.

## Definitions of Creativity

The Merriam Webster's Dictionary provides *creativity* a simple but concise definition as 1) the quality of being creative; and 2) the ability to create.

J. P. Guilford's 1950 presidential address to the American Psychological Association effectively defined creativity. The wide spread interest on the topic not only confined to the field of psychology over the last half century, but the interest seems to be even stronger outside these boundaries.

Guilford (1959) stated that creative thinking could be loosely defined as divergent thinking, but it would be incorrect to attribute the creative thinking to all the intellectual components (p. 182). He further elaborated that there are aptitude traits for creative thinking and non-aptitude traits that related to creativity. The primary traits (aptitude) for creative thinking are 1) *fluency*; 2) *flexibility*; and 3) *originality* (p. 170-178). It was hypothesized that fluency of thinking would be an important aspect of creativity.

1) *Fluency* includes:

*word fluency* - The ability to produce words each containing a specified letter or combination of letters, it has found to be related in both science and arts students.

*associational fluency* - To produce as many synonyms as one can for a given word and a quick running over of words is an advantage. It tends to have a stronger need for adventure and more tolerance of ambiguity.

*expressional fluency* - The production and rapid juxtaposition of phrases or sentences and it is identified that it has a moderate correlation between corresponding performances in writing and in oral speech.

*ideational fluency* - The ability to produce ideas and it plays an important

role in problem solving. Individuals of this kind are found to be more impulsive but confident, and to have stronger appreciation of creativity.

Creative thinkers are also identified as flexible thinkers.

2) *Flexibility* thinking involves:

*spontaneous flexibility* - The ability or disposition to produce a great variety of ideas with freedom without the influence or bondage of previous knowledge and have a stronger need for variety.

*adaptive flexibility* - It requires usual as well as unusual ways to deal with problems.

Besides *fluency* and *flexibility*, it is expected to find trait of *originality* in the area of creativity.

3) *Originality*, in a statistical sense, is a relatively infrequent occurrence and unusual responses. It is a common understanding that original acts are relative to some specified commonality (Barron, 1955: 274). The traits of *originality* call for *remote associations* or *relationships*, *redefinition* (the ability to give up the old interpretations and use them in a new way, and the ability to improvise), and *elaboration*. The unoriginal person is more inclined to discipline and meticulous. The original person tends to be more confident, more reflective, divergent in thinking and esthetic expression.

Moreover, motivation, temperament, willingness to work hard and to work long hours are considered as non-aptitude traits that significantly contributed to an individual's creative performance.

A creative individual does not necessarily own all of the above traits, and a highly creative individual does not necessarily be also a highly intelligent being (Wallach and Kogan, 1965).

### **Definitions of Creativity in Music Education**

Holding similar views with Guilford, John Kratus (1990), an American music educator, identified three essential traits of creativity in music: originality, fluency, and flexibility. Two creative processes in music, the improvisations and compositions, are essential in which the individual is engaging in the creative process of problem finding, idea generation, modification of ideas, and evaluation of tentative solutions. However, the creative thinking is not only confined in the "composer", but also the "performer", who makes decisions on how a composition should sound.

In other words, improvisations, compositions and performance are all the creative products of both composers and performers who engage in the creative music process (p. 44).

The well-known American music educator, Peter Webster (1990), who is currently teaching at Northwestern University, defined creative thinking in music as:

“a dynamic mental process that alternates between divergent (imaginative) and convergent (factual) thinking, moving in stages over time. It is enabled by internal musical skills and outside conditions and results in a final musical product that is new for the creator” (p. 31).

In order to gain better than understanding of creative thinking in music, Webster mentioned that musical imagination, conceptual modeling, measurement, and observation are needed.

### **The Value of Creativity in the School Music Curriculum**

Creativity is being valued since the 1950 in the western countries especially in the field of music education. “Reform in music education is badly needed, and even the most insensitive among us are aware of something amiss in the world of music”, announced by the American music educator, Robert Sherman (1971: 11). Sherman is not only urging the reform in the music curriculum content, its relevance to children inside and outside the music classroom, but also a proper balanced in the music curriculum that incorporates creativity. Learning takes place when creative acts is developed and lead to “knowing” (in Sherman terms, knowing is a cultivated condition and it is nourished by the kind of doing that begets discovery, p. 7). Ross (1975) and Witkin (1974) hold the similar view that the creative process is essentially the same in all art forms and that involvement in this process leads to the development of subjective knowing.

Alfred Balkin (1990), an American educator, recognized that creative adults are developed from creative children. Creative people change the world. He admitted that “the development of creativity is crucial to the future of our children, our nation, and our world. Education can be instrumental in helping children grow creatively, yet little is done to develop genuine creativity in music and hence in life” (p. 39).

John Paynter (1982), the well-known music educator and the forerunner of creativity in music in Britain, suggests that, “if the idea of ‘music as a creative art’ is central to music in education, any consequent attempt to develop the curriculum, although it

will presumably include a wide variety of musical activities and skill learning, music surely give some prominence to composition, both as small-group work and as an individual activity” (p. 178).

### **The Nurture of Creativity in Formal Education**

Although the value of creativity is recognized, it was found out that the educational system in both England and the States not only discouraged creativity, but suppressed children’s creative impulses (MacKinnon, 1962; Hudson, 1966). MacKinnon, an American psychologist, finds out that creative individuals are often undistinguished academically. Though Darwin and Einstein were failed or undistinguished at school, they produced the theories of evolution and relativity respectively. As Hudson commented: “That conventional education is uncongenial to independent spirits seems to me incontestable; also, that much of what passes for education in this country and the United States is a waste of everyone’s time, pupils and teachers alike” (p. 232). Conventional education breeds conformists and convergents. To be creative is to be impulsive, unpredictable, disobedient, poorly disciplined and dangerous. However, progressive education does make children more happier than conventional ones. To be progressive or conventional in education is a matter of choosing to have more brainworkers or stunts.

Robert Sherman (1971:8) shared the similar views with MacKinnon that since genuine creative activity is anti-establishment by nature, it is difficult to accept within the educational establishment. In the systems of western education, there is a constant conflict between divergent thinking (creativity) and convergent thinking (conformity). As Jonathan Stephens (1994:240) once commented, “the presence of individuality or non-conformist behavior may be perceived as a challenge to the system and therefore something to be suppressed”.

Rogers (1959), an American psychotherapist, points out that there is a strong social need for the creative acts of creative individuals, however, there is a dearth of creativeness in education, socially, and economically:

1. In education we tend to turn out conformists, stereotypes, individuals whose education is ‘completed’, rather than freely creative and original thinkers;
2. In our leisure-time activities, passive entertainment and regimented group action are overwhelmingly predominant, whereas creative activities are much less in evidence;
3. In the sciences, there is an ample supply of technicians, but the number who

- can creatively formulate fruitful hypotheses and theories is small indeed;
4. In industry, creation is reserved for the few – the manager, the designer, the head of the research department – whereas for the many life is devoid of original or creative endeavor;
  5. In individual and family life the same picture holds true. In the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the books we read, and the ideas we hold, there is a strong tendency toward conformity, toward stereotypy. To be original or different is felt to be ‘dangerous’. (p. 137)

In order to nurture creativity and let it flourish, Rogers (1959) postulated that there are three conditions within individuals that need to be observed:

1. Openness to experience: extensionality – Whether the stimulus originates in the environment, in the impact of form, color or sound on the environment, it is available to awareness. That is instead of perceiving in predetermined categories, the individual is aware of this existential moment as it is;
2. An internal locus of evaluation – The value of the creative person’s product is established not by the praise, recognition or criticism of others, but by himself;
3. The ability to toy with elements and concepts – The ability to play spontaneously with ideas, colors, shapes, relationships – to juggle elements into impossible juxtapositions, to shape wild hypotheses, to make the given problematic, to express the ridiculous, to translate form one form to another, to transform into improbable equivalents. (p. 143-144)

Elizabeth Oehrle (1986: 167) recognized that creativity is an essential components in western education. The nurture of creative behaviors requires “showing confidence in children by valuing their ideas, granting them some freedom to explore their ideas and their environment, granting them periods of non-evaluative practice, encouraging them to learn from their own mistakes and to share and work together on ideas”. Certainly valuing pupils’ ideas and granting them freedom are essential pre-requisites in nurture creativity, however, there should be no rights or wrongs that Oehrle called “mistakes” in the creative process. Creative process is a mental process that involves choosing, rejecting and selecting of which is better and more appropriate in a certain context rather than evaluating and judging the rights and wrongs during the process.

### **The Birth of Creative Music Making in School Music Curriculum**

The influence of contemporary music on the school music curriculum played an important role in the 1950s and 1960s. The composer Henri Pousseur has since pointed out that it was the avant-garde musical styles of the 1950s and 1960s which make possible developments in school music at that time. (See Paynter, 1992:5) Although it is often said that the music being taught in school is far behind to those who practise it, the new ideas and compositional practices in professional world indeed play an important role in the development of the music curriculum content and teaching methodologies in the second half of this century. As Robert Walker boldly announced the birth of creative music in schools:

“During the 1960s the music of Beatles was not the only new musical influence confronting schoolchildren. In a number of classrooms in England and North America could be heard sounds which related to the work of a number of twentieth century composers, notably John Cage, Edgard Varese, Stockhausen and many others. By 1970 “creative music in schools” had arrived. The British Inspectorate of Schools issued a paper advocating the use of various improvisatory and compositional approaches to class music.” (Walker, 1983:86)

### ***Tonal Music Vs Tone Colour Music***

Pitch, rhythm and timbre are the primary musical elements that composers employ in their compositions. Each musical period in the music history is characterized by some distinct uses and treatments of these elements. Timbre matters little to the Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque composers. Instruments and voices could be interchanged freely in medieval motets as well as Renaissance secular music. The performance of Baroque music is based on the availability of the instruments. It is the modal system, major and minor mode began to take shape. Baroque music is therefore predominately melodic and harmonic. Although Classical composers fond of a more light and elegant texture, melody and harmony are still the predominant musical elements. Nineteenth century composers became more and more interested in timbre with the new innovation on piano construction, addition of valves on brass instruments, expansion of orchestra and percussion. Colourful combinations of instrumentation, full use of instrumental range and ambiguity of tonality prevailed in Romantic music. Berlioz concerned more on the use of different kinds of drum sticks to produce the desirable tone colour. Meticulous markings on Malher’s score are to ensure conductors authentically produce the “right” tone colour. The perception of music in the twentieth century has undergone a revolution that never happen before.

Debussy would be one of the first composers in the twentieth century to break the old conventions of tension and release in tonal music. Dynamics, tempo, instrumentation and texture no longer treated as the servant of melody and harmony, as well as concords and discords. Whole tones and pentatonic scale are employed to avoid the pull and contrasts in using the “tonics” and leading notes. The shifts from one sonority to another and the impression of shifting qualities are evident in his *La Mer* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Though Schönberg put an emphasis on all the twelve notes of chromatic scale and abandon the major and minor tonal concepts, his music is basically built on the principles of melody and harmony. His early works sound very similar to Wagner’s late music. It is Anton Webern, the outstanding pupil of Schönberg that fully developed the idea of sound and colour. Assigning different to individual notes of a melody to achieve the colourful effect in a “melody” – *Klangfarbenmelodie* is evident in its careful use and highly selective and persistence in the use of individual tone colour. Messiaen and Berio adopted the serial techniques of Schönberg and Webern with Messiaen put more focus on the rhythm and Berio later interested in the development of *musique concrète* and electronic music. Stockhausen became more deeply involved in *musique concrète* and the use of “noises” as musical materials to generate sounds. To Stockhausen, electronic music is the best means to satisfy his demands on note lengths and dynamics. John Cage on the other hand rejected the Western conventional ways in composition and showed the Eastern influences in his works. In advocating the concept of indeterminacy and *I Ching*, he encouraged the performers to participate and determine the events of a composition. He also breaks the gap between sound and silence so as to use them freely in his compositions. Penderecki’s *Threnody: to the Victims of Hiroshima* showed the special interest of timbre and texture through the unconventional use of conventional instruments and voices. The highly organized gradations of instrumental colour is a landmark of producing exciting textures and colours in the twentieth century music.

The new conceptions on music, innovative musical practices and newly invented notations are factors contribute to the birth and growth of creative music making in school music in the mid-twentieth century.

### **Creative Music Making Vs Creative Music Teaching in the School Music Curriculum**

For most people, creative music making in music education probably means the act of composing or improvising. John Paynter (1982), suggests that composition begins with improvisation. Improvisation begins with simple sound ideas, draw out the

potential relationships, choosing one approach or another, rejecting things, and developing unifying ideas. Composition is completed when one works with the improvisation again and again until the order of events and their development becomes established in an overall design (p. 100-103). Students' compositions should then start with ideas in sound. Music teachers should start with where their pupils are, youngsters should be allowed to start with the sound first, and later the notation (sign).

John Paynter not only suggests creative music making (improvisation and composition) in a narrow sense, but also creative music teaching that incorporates performance and listening besides the composition in a broader sense (p. 119-137). That is music should be taught creatively, it points to the widest application of the word, creativity, i.e. making-interpreting-listening. Even at the most elementary level that requires simple techniques, pupils should be encouraged to make their own interpretative decision in creative performance. To allow for divergent thinking in their creative performance is to provide rooms for them to decide how the music should go (tempo, dynamics etc.), the mood of the music, the suitable way of presenting it, the foreground and background of the music, and the feeling of the piece. "Every performance must try to *present* the music; to *re-create* it sensitively and with the utmost skill the performer(s) can bring to the task" (p. 123).

In other words, performance in the perspective of music education is infused with higher vision. Performance like choirs, bands and orchestras is often over-emphasized outside the time-tabled curriculum that music teachers could only find the justifications for their existence, appreciation as well as recognition through the extra-curricular performances in the expense of their class music teaching. As Robert Walker (1991:171), the versatile music educator who had extensive music teaching experience in a number of nations, once commented, "classroom music should not be a sort of band or choir rehearsal, but an educational experience comprising creative and generative activities by the children followed by critical thinking about these activities: the kind of thing which goes on in every other subject in primary and elementary schools nowadays". In other words, performing or listening activities should not be conducted for its own sake, it has an aim of cultivating pupils creative and critical thinking by means of these activities. Composing, performing and listening should be treated as a whole entity in the process of music education instead of separate, autonomous and unconnected music activities. It should be a synthesis of various musical activities so as to create a unified experience for pupils. Otherwise, music education will end up, as Walker (1991: 173) further commented,



“in the lack of linkage between the three activities (composing, performing, listening) retains many of the old problems of music teaching”.

Ebenezer Prout, the Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music and later Professor in Dublin, stated that music is meant for the ear, not for the eye. John Paynter realized that the most ‘real’ of musical skills is to keep our ears open to sounds. Classroom work should be based upon performing, improvising and composing, and in the forefront of all activities, the development of aural sensitivity and awareness. It is only from there that we can develop activities which are inventive, interpretative, and perceptual in whatever styles, forms and structures are appropriate for the pupils (p. 28). He realized that listening is a creative act that the listener should play a part in a performance:

Listening is an adventure of the imagination in a world of sounds and to anyone who has not been involved with such first-hand participation, to approach music first by way of recorded performances can present difficulties. A recording has about the same amount value as a photograph of a painting: it is a useful tool for further study if we have already had the direct experience, but without previous and substantial encounter with the reality of music in performance – either as listeners or as singers/instrumentalists – a recording conveys only a small part of the whole...A disco, for all its atmosphere, does not attract the same kind of enthusiastic support given to live performance, for example at open-air rock concerts and pop festivals. No matter how good a recording is technically, as an experience of music it is limited (p. 25-26).

In other words, music teachers should be aware that no matter the sound equipment in the music room is how sophisticated (in most cases are not true), and how the recording is technically authentic, to play a recording of a great composer for music appreciation has its own built in deficiency. The experience of listening should be regarded as an aspect of creativity. We should therefore “try to organize our programme of music activities so that children learn to keep their ears open, to use their own judgement and discrimination about sounds and, through first-hand practical work in improvisation, composition and performance, come to understand how composers create worlds of sound which any of us can inhabit just by using our ears, and by giving the sounds our undivided attention” (p. 133-134). To emphasize on knowledge transmission (i.e. music theory and life of composers), skill-acquisition (performing) and instruction in music education only echoes the notion of suppression of creativity in individuals and in learning approaches postulated by the

conventionalists and traditionalists.

The integration and cohesion of composing, performing and listening in music teaching is not only a strong move in the primary and secondary school settings, but also in the tertiary sector: "We shouldn't be teaching ear training, music literacy and writing, history, etc, all boxed up into separate bits and pieces. We should be integrating the whole lot. This is very threatening to a lot of tertiary teachers" (Bridges, 1990:8).

In short, Paynter advocates that composing, performing and listening should be treated as a holistic integration of music making in the music classroom. Creative music is often taken the exclusive meaning as suggests a dichotomy between creative music making activities and other aspects of school music-making. "All musical knowledge and skill can be put to creative use" (Paynter, 1982: 137). That is the essence of creative music teaching.

To place music education in a boarder perspective, arts education, Plummeridge (1985:50) argued that the arts education should be concerned mainly with "creative" rather than "re-creative" or "appreciative" activities. In terms of music education, music activities should furnish pupils with expressive media mainly concerned with composing rather than mere performing or listening activities.

To encourage creative activity in music teaching is often hard for music teachers especially most of them are trained in the traditional way with heavily skill and knowledge oriented. Music teaching would be challenging if it requires creativeness. "A creative approach provides a vital integrative force in our teaching, focusing as it does on the development of the imagination as well as skills, the ability to make interesting and constructive connections, and flexibility and adaptability within an ever-changing environment" (Stephens, 1994:242).

"The education of an artistic eye or a musical ear begins when we start to explore the mans of expression, simultaneously encountering and learning to enjoy the creations and presentations of others, which then further inspire our own attempts." (Paynter, 1992:20) Creativity in music classroom and creative music teaching are no longer as some impossible and pretentious goals when we are willing to nourish pupils' inventiveness, creativeness and imagination.

### **Some Final Words**

The period before the end of nineteenth century in music history could be regarded as “tonal” music in which the system of tonality dominates the entire compositional activity. It is the melody, harmony and rhythm that dominate compositions. Starting from the twentieth century onward, the scene changed, timbre/tone colour is the focus in compositions with or without “reliance” on melody and harmony.

Wagner, Mahler, Rimsky Korsakov, etc. are the composers who stretch the conventional use of instrumentation, harmony, tonality, melody and rhythm for satisfying their quest for new tone colours. Starting from Debussy, the use of tone colour has become the prime purpose in composition and for its own sake without the restraints from harmony and tonality. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Messiaen and Penderecki totally abandoned the tonality and refused to “serve” harmony and melody in their compositions. They looked for new tone colours by the unconventional use/play on conventional instruments (include voice). Varese and Stockhausen make use of electronic equipment to add new impetus to the movement. John Cage opened up the minds of musicians and composers that silence is also a kind of “tone colour”.

It is all these movements of “timbre” (avant-garde) that dominate the composition activity in the twentieth century and influenced the creative music movement in the music curriculum especially on UK, Australia, Canada and USA (in 1960s and 1970s only). However, Robert Walker comment in 1983, experimental music is still treated as experimental at that time. Even towards the end of the twentieth century, the gap between the “proper” music and contemporary music in music classroom is a big problem unsolved, and as Malcolm Ross comment, the children are entirely sacrificed to the pops. Not surprisingly, this kind of gap seems didn't exist before nineteenth century in any of the music curriculum. This may be due to several reasons:

- 1) The Americans totally abandoned this way of composition which mainly focus on sound exploration (tone colour) after the CMP and MMCP and turn to performance instead;
- 2) Tonal music is a kind of music that the kids and ordinary average people can grasp, sing, perform and consume in their daily without undergoing intensive training in music; but not the case in “tone colour” music. Tone colour music in the twentieth century music could not be produced by ordinary people and could only be encounter occasionally in today's concert hall on the one hand (not easily accessible), and they cannot perform it on

the other.

- 3) "Tone colour" music (or sound exploration, experimental music) practised in music classroom requires group ensemble and combinations of various pitched or/and unpitched to produce the desirable tone colour, this is the music that they cannot produce when they leave the "laboratory" - music room. In which this kind of music cannot be brought to their daily lives and bring it home. But instead, they can bring those tonal music home by using any of the melody instruments or keyboard or their voice. That is probably why tonal music (and pop music) still gain its popularity.
- 4) This kind of gap does not exist in other art form (media, visual arts, and drama) is because the contemporary way of making art is "user friendly", and can be applied and consume in their daily lives. It is natural for the art practitioners to seek contemporary sources for inspirations and as tools or aids in their teaching. However, this kind of practices seldom exit in music teaching.

George Self lamented that "it is a sad reflection that although many children use their creative energies in painting and poetry, their musical activities are usually confined to performance and listening" (Self, 1967:3). Tremendous efforts have been made in the last few decades to incorporate creative elements in school music curriculum, "tone colour" music and sound exploration have been the major focus in these movements. It is time that the professional music world and music education world need to continually search for "new" elements and new identity in composition that can gain the acceptance by both layman and professionals in the coming millenium.