

## EDITORIAL

# Editorial – What do we know in music education?

Knowledge in music education is a highly complex and problematic area in music education. In this editorial, we are focussing on some aspects of this issue, particularly as viewed through the very particular lens of coverage over the years in the pages of this journal.

Back in 1982, a former editor of the *British Journal of Music Education* was grappling with this matter and produced a short list of knowledge types for music education that still seem to work well today:

- Know how to: ... spell a word ... manipulate a musical instrument
- Knowing that: ...  $2 + 7 = 9$  ... Beethoven wrote nine symphonies
- Knowing by acquaintance: knowing him/her/it.. a painting ... specific knowledge of a musical work
- Knowing what's what: ... what we like ... what we value (Swanwick & Taylor, 1982 p.7)

Moving to a more recent publication, in his BJME review of Graham McPhail's (2022) book 'Knowledge and Music Education', Ian Axtell noted that McPhail distinguished between:

'two types of knowledge – epistemic knowledge (from the disciplines) and sociocultural knowledge (from everyday life)' and 'two key knowledge forms within epistemic knowledge: knowledge-that (knowledge of something) and know-how-to (knowing how to do something with that knowledge of something)' (Axtell, 2023 p408; citing McPhail (ibid) p28).

Previously in the *BJME*, McPhail had noted that:

... consideration of ... epistemological aspects of differentiation of knowledge forms is largely absent from discussion in the music education literature which tends to focus on pedagogy (McPhail, 2016, p. 44).

Taking this as a cue, thinking about epistemological aspects is worthy of further, and more detailed consideration. What we can state already is that notions of knowledge in music education, then, are clearly both complex and problematic. So why is this matter worthy of discussion here in a BJME editorial? It has been addressed before on a number of occasions (inter alia Fautley & Murphy, 2015, 2016; Fautley & Daubney, 2019); however, it has reappeared, in England at least, as an issue to the fore of thinking in education broadly, and particularly in music education, most notably in some aspects of recent music education policy. A number of these aspects have been covered recently in the pages of the BJME in some detail, including, but not restricted to, Whittaker (2021) and Leveridge (2022). Susan Young, in her 2023 BJME article, makes this pertinent point:

... the relationships between ideology, knowledge and power representing the interests of particular social groups and the linked interests of commercially orientated music education individuals, organisations and institutions (Young, 2023 p.148).

And it is this which is worthy of consideration by both a local and an international readership. It begs the question ‘what knowledge do we want our children and young people to have?’ Even asking such a question in this fashion raises yet another problematic matter – is knowledge a possession? Anna Sfard (1998) described two metaphors for learning, what she called the *acquisition metaphor* and the *participation metaphor*. In the acquisition metaphor, learning is viewed as a possession:

This approach, which today seems natural and self-evident, brings to mind the activity of accumulating material goods. The language . . . makes us think about the human mind as a container to be filled with certain materials and about the learner as becoming the owner of these materials (Sfard, 1998 p.5).

By way of contrast, however, in the participation metaphor:

. . . learning a subject is now conceived of as a process of becoming a member of a certain community. This entails, above all, the ability to communicate in the language of the community and act according to its particular norms. (Ibid, p.6).

In other words, what takes place in participation is that ‘. . . the permanence of having gives way to the constant flux of doing’ (ibid, p.6). And one thing we do know is that a lot of ‘doing’ takes place in music education. Sfard’s two ways of viewing knowledge have significance for us in music education, for example in some contexts participation in a musical activity is seen as being in and of itself sufficient (Nenadic, 2023), whereas in others, such as in England’s government-mandated *Model Music Curriculum* (DFE, 2021), knowledge is configured as curriculum content and delineated in a progressive and acquisitional fashion, although with participatory elements too.

Epistemologically speaking, there is a need for ‘knowing’ to be considered separately from what Sfard might call knowledge-as-product, a point recognised by von Glasersfeld when he observed that words alone may not be sufficient to contain knowledge, and that:

. . . once we come to see this essential and inescapable subjectivity of linguistic meaning, we can no longer maintain the preconceived notion that words convey ideas or knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1989 p.133).

This idea of von Glasersfeld was cited by Major and Cottle (2010) here in the BJME, where they noted that:

Glasersfeld (1989) called this ‘viable knowledge’, to describe learning where understandings are explored through practical activities.

In music education, we have no issues with thinking about pedagogies which explore ideas through the practical medium of creating and making music. However, one of the many implications of this for music education is that we need to distinguish between ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge’. Knowing and knowledge are not the same thing, and therefore what students are knowing is not necessarily a simple matter, and it can be the case when teaching and learning music, as Carroll (2021) (p.205) noted, ‘this required that students translate their ‘knowing’ into “knowledge”’. When we add to this already complex mix the notion that children and young people come to school with a great deal of knowledge and knowing about music education already, and that some of this may well be tacit, we are taken into the realm of Polanyi’s maxim, as cited in BJME by Swanwick back in 1990:

... beautifully and simply expressed by the scientist/ philosopher, Polanyi, in his pregnant phrase, 'we can know more than we can tell'. Much if not most knowledge is indeed tacit: we do know more than we can tell... (Swanwick, 1990, p.217)

But what can we do about this? For us as music educators and researchers, we are keen as a community to be taking learning forwards and contributing to thinking about doing this in children and young people. This brings to mind one of the classic, much-cited pieces of educational research literature (Cobb, 1999), where it was asked 'whether development is cognitive self-organisation or enculturation into established practice', which point is in itself food for thought for all of the various aspects under consideration.

Why does all this matter? It matters because when reading or writing for an international journal, we are not in our own private echo chambers, and we need to both be aware of, and consider that, what in our own silo we might see as unproblematic and straightforward may well be far from the case in other places, situations and contexts. There are all sorts of ramifications to this, including political, sociological, cultural, situational and economic, but as an international community we need to be very aware of the sorts of knowledge we may be promoting, whether wittingly or unwittingly, and maybe what we are guilty of omitting, again whether deliberately or tacitly. This is no easy feat, and whilst we are not always readily able or equipped to think outside of our own experiences, nonetheless these will be very apparent when we read about contexts far from our own, or by others in those other contexts reading about what for us is the quotidian unremarkable experience.

However, and possibly most importantly, we are in a situation wherein neoliberal governments are increasingly keen to intervene and interfere in music education, and do this by creating policy (see Schmidt, 2017, 2020 for a discussion of this in relation to music education), which will then, in many cases, determine 'who gets what, when [and] how' (Knill & Tosun, 2020, p.1), and we know that for us in music education we can often be last in the queue for any such distribution!

So, to return to the theme of this editorial, music education involves knowledge and knowing, and this exists in a variety of types. We need to be aware that this is not simple, and that there are those who may wish to control both of these aspects for political reasons, however well-intentioned, and that there can be those who are looking to profit financially from the provision of pre-packaged knowledge units which they can sell. As a community, we need to be aware that knowledge is unlikely to be innocent, and that we need to be always on our guard, and asking questions concerning whose knowledge and why.

Which brings us to this current edition of the BJME. We open with the second of two articles by Helen Whitford and Dimitra Kokotsaki, sharing survey findings from three schools in the Northeast of England. The first article, published in the previous edition, focussed on students' attitudes to school music and perceived barriers to GCSE music uptake. This current paper shares research findings on enjoyment of music and GCSE uptake. It offers a timely reminder that it is important to listen to the views of young people about their experiences of music education. It finds that, 'in line with previous research, the most enjoyable parts of music lessons were those which involved playing instruments and participating in practical work, composing, learning new pieces, working in groups... and making use of music technology'. Whilst, as the authors point out, this is a small-scale study that is not generalisable to the wider population, there is plenty of food for thought here for teachers across many other settings.

Ian Axtell's article 'Rethinking pedagogic identities for Key Stage 3 general classroom music teacher education: an autoethnographic study' offers a fascinating insight into the author's 'shifting position within the field of general classroom music'. Using critical enquiry, it examines his own career as a classroom music teacher for 20 years and then as a music teacher-educator at an inner-city university. It highlights implicit and explicit influences on identities, pedagogic and curriculum choices and how these shift around over time. Axtell candidly examines how

undertaking this research has developed his thinking and practice in relation to working with early career secondary school music teachers.

Turning to instrumental teaching, Catherine Cossey's article 'An investigation into the factors influencing teachers' inclusion of improvisation in piano lessons' reports on the findings of a survey with 117 UK-based piano teachers. It highlights the importance of instrumental teachers having access to professional development in order to build their own understanding and skills in relation to improvisation if they are to successfully integrate it into their own teaching.

Sylvia Bruinders' article 'Transforming African musics at a South African university' challenges readers to think about dominant paradigms in university music education. It critically examines the efforts, challenges and successes of starting the process of adapting the music curriculum at one South African University. To be more culturally responsive. As with Cossey's article, it argues for the voice and aspirations of students to be central if changes are to be meaningful.

The four articles in the second half of this edition all relate to research with and by teachers at different points in their career and in different national contexts. Jesús Tejada, Adolf Murillo and Borja Mateu-Luján's article reports on exploratory research with specialist trainee music teachers at a Spanish university 'creating spaces for integrating creativity, electroacoustic music and digital competencies for student teachers'. Following this, Tamara Rumiantsev, Roeland van der Rijst, Wobbe Kuiper, Arie Verhaar and Wilfried Admiraal explore 'Teacher professional development and educational innovation through action research in conservatoire education in the Netherlands'. This article explores the impact of the two very experienced practitioners researching their own contexts, with the specific aim of 'improving their courses'. The article by Eva Bojner Horwitz, David Thorarinn Johnson, Viveka Lyberg-Åhlander, Birgitta Sahlén, Petri Laukka and Pia Bygdéus reports on a focus group interview study with primary school teachers in Sweden to 'increase understanding of how singing activities may be initiated in primary school, and what support and assistance teachers require to conduct singing activities as an integrated part of the school day'. Staying with primary school teaching, the final article, by Anna Mariguddi and Ian Shirley, entitled 'Exploring the potential of informal music learning in a perceived age of pedagogical traditionalism for student teachers in primary music education' reports on a study which implemented informal learning approaches into a primary teacher education programme.

Despite the studies taking place in four different European countries, it is striking that there is much commonality between these articles in relation to the recognition of what learners bring to every learning situation and the potential for capitalising on this, which are strong themes through these research studies. All come from a place of wanting to improve music education for pupils in schools, and all, to a greater or lesser extent, seek to 'disrupt' and challenge the current discourse in education in each of the settings. They all recognise the importance of nurturing and scaffolding teachers if they are to be supported to reflect upon their own work and thinking and to not only embrace new ideas but also adapt and explore creative ways to implement change within their own teaching.

The thinking in these articles takes us full circle, as all grapple with the question 'what knowledge do we want our children and young people to have?' Beyond this, they go on to consider not just the 'what' but the 'how', which is surely central to the broader appeal of music and a core, and perhaps universal, ambition of music education, to encourage people to engage in making and creating music well, wherever they are in the world and whatever that means in their context.

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