



Introducing experience-centred approaches in music teacher education—Opportunities for pedagogic metamorphosis



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ABSTRACT

Education experts emphasise the growing pedagogic urgency to cultivate exploratory, creative habits of mind. As contemporary scientific inquiry has revealed, a major obstacle in this process is the predominant view of creativity as powered by the intellect. We addressed this concern by looking at embodied forms of creative connectivity. Our study focused on the Kokas pedagogy: an experiential extension of the Kodaly principle of music education. We explored the adaptability and the transformative potentials of this pedagogy in the context of music teacher education. Based on the qualitative analysis of the first student cohorts' reflective essays (13 altogether), we studied students' sense making of the *otherness* of the pedagogy. In particular, we looked at the key tensions students documented, and investigated students' reflective construction of their own responses to these. In doing so, we hoped to capture the choreography of students' meaning making of their experiences. Furthermore, we looked at the transformational power of students' immersion in the pedagogy: the extent to which it inspired them towards a fundamental change in perspectives, inciting a *pedagogic metamorphosis*. Our analysis revealed that the challenges reported by students were often overcome through participatory, creative experiences of being and becoming. Thus, the inherent features of the pedagogy offered the tools to respond to the transformational opportunities it presented. Going beyond the context of music education, our study shows the significance of experiential, embodied connectivity between teachers and students in paving the way towards the transformation of the personal, professional and institutional habits of mind.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Creativity and learning: moving towards a holistic approach

We are currently witnessing the inescapable necessity to re-imagine education. Recent decades have seen an increased awareness of the societal need for creative thinking, leading to a 'revolution of creativity in education' (Craft, 2005). As part of all this, experts stress the urgency to cultivate an exploratory, *probing mindset* in students (Sims, 2011). Exploratory habits of mind are essential for creativity (Sawyer 2012) and are powerful indicators of flexibility and resilience (Sims, 2011). However, a major limitation is the predominant view of creativity as powered by the intellect, with relatively little

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attention to the affective or embodied dimensions of creative connection building (Vass, Littleton, Jones, & Miell, 2014). This may be the historical residue of positivist beliefs about knowledge, which have become deeply ingrained in the prevalent Western educational paradigm: a *Cartesian Catastrophe* (Koestler, 1964). Powerful challenges to the Cartesian dichotomies have emerged in recent decades with two interwoven themes: the ‘embodied’ essence of the mind and the centrality of emotions in perception, learning and understanding.¹ Music research, in particular, has revealed the embodied and affectively constituted nature of human psychological functioning (e.g. Clayton, 2007; Sawyer 2007; Seddon, 2004). Our work contributes to this line of research.

In our conceptual framing, our first anchor is contemporary creativity research, emphasising the role of unconscious mentation in new discoveries (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Dijksterhuis & Meurs, 2006; Gelernter, 1994; Sharples, 1999; Ritter, van Baaren, & Dijksterhuis, 2012). For instance, Gelernter (1994) associates creative analogy formation with *low focus thinking* – stream of consciousness or daydreaming – and has coined the term *affect-linking* to describe the process by which logically unexpected, yet still coherent associations. On the other hand, Csikszentmihalyi (2000) describes the creative process as an autotelic *flow* experience, which involves the merging of the self with the environment, the “merging of action and awareness” (p. 38) and the loss of self-consciousness to a transcendental extent. We see no contradiction here. Trance-like concentration and day-dreaming may be different in many ways, but in both cases the mind is liberated from the constraints of conscious controls (Koestler, 1964). Thus, both the extreme centering of attention and the self-abandonment of day-dreaming result in a state of consciousness where the mind simply ‘takes over’. Therefore, the heightened focus and undivided attention characteristic of *flow experience* is rather similar to the diffuse thought processes of day-dreaming in terms of the creative potentials it affords. Our work is also informed by recent empirical research on the creative collaborations of adult artists (e.g. Clayton, 2007; Sawyer 2007; Seddon, 2004; Storey & Joubert, 2004), which point towards the salience of affectively constituted thinking in creative collaborations.

Our second, deeply interrelated, conceptual anchor is contemporary scientific inquiry into embodied learning. The central premise of the *embodied* approach is that bodily and emotional experiences determine our capacity for reason (Damasio, 1994), our physical interactions with our environment conditioning the way we understand this environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, 2008). This turn towards the reconnection of the body and the mind has been grounded in philosophy – for instance Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927) and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account in *Structure of Behavior* (1947) – and has taken different routes across disciplines, ranging from cognitive science and neuroscience (e.g. Barsalou, 1999; Clark, 1999; Damasio, 1994; Niedenthal, 2007; Wilson, 2002; and Winkelman, Niedenthal, & Oberman, 2008), biology and natural sciences (e.g. H  ther, 2008; Rayner, 2011; Rayner & Jarvilehto, 2008), sociology (Ignatow, 2007), education (Chappell & Craft, 2011; Dadds, 2008; Mino & Sandoval, 2015; Pastore & Pentassuglia, 2015), linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), dance education (Anttila, 2015; Degerb  l & Svendler Nielsen, 2015; Kipling Brown, 2015; Svendler Nielsen, 2012) music education (Almeida, Overy, & Miell, 2016; Juntunen & Westerlund, 2011) or *dance-movement* therapy (Meekums, 2002; Merenyi, 2004).

The simultaneously emerging philosophical and empirical work on *bodymind* point towards the fundamental role of embodied experience in sense-making, knowing and relating. A valuable proposition by Johnson (2008), especially for our own research, is that musical experiences are the optimal context in which the embodied essence of the mind can be evidenced as well as nurtured. In this sense, music does not ‘translate’ into experience (and therefore is not simply a re-enactment of experience) but constitutes lived experience. Such a non-representational approach to the study of the mind expands our conceptualisation of what it means to create meaning, including but not restricted to language. In educational sciences, *sociomaterial* approaches have brought a similarly refreshing take on the relationship between learning and action (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). Recently, these philosophical and empirical insights have started to filter into educational policy and practice. For instance, the new Finnish curriculum has actually incorporated embodiment in their learning concept (Anttila, personal communication, October 2016).

Finally, we need to note the increasing relevance and timeliness of Vygotsky’s theorising which, formulated in the 1930s, foreshadows these powerful challenges to the Cartesian dichotomies. Going against the prevalent intellectualistic focus, Vygotsky emphasised the existence of “a dynamic meaningful system that constitutes a unity of affective and intellectual processes” (1987, p. 50 in Holzman, 2008). Vygotsky used the concept of *perezhivanie* to capture the fundamental role of emotions in the framing and interpretation of human experience (Smagorinski, 2011), and the interrelationship between emotion and cognition as catalysts of imagination and creativity. He also problematised the dualistic approach to the person and their physical environment, arguing that “consciousness must not be separated from its physical conditions: They comprise one natural whole that must be studied as such” (1996 p. 228 in Smagorinski, 2011).

1.2. Experience-centred pedagogies

Neo-Vygotskian socio-cultural approaches to learning advocate a *student-centred constructivist model*, where students are given an active role, co-constructing knowledge and understanding through dialogue. Dialogic pedagogies have gained considerable significance in recent years, from the early years (White, 2015) to higher education (Matusov & Brobst, 2013), with powerful extensions of dialogism into the new technological era (Wegerif, 2013). Our work embraces and extends this

¹ See Guy Claxton’s rich synthesis of contemporary conceptualisations and research on embodiment in cognitive sciences.

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