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by Anna Gower

INTRODUCTION

'Music is a universal language that embodies one of the highest forms of creativity. A high-quality music education should engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music and their talent as musicians, and so increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement.' *DFE, England, Programmes of Study for music at KS3*

Creativity and the music classroom

Recent discussions about a model curriculum for music in England have thrown up an interesting perspective on the purpose and aims of a classroom music education. There is already a tried and tested approach to music education outside the classroom, one that is firmly rooted in learning to play a musical instrument, with associated music theory, aural skills and assessment embedded into the process through graded music exams.

With graded instrumental repertoire widely available, and three out of four GCSE exam boards linking standards to an equivalent grade, there can be a bias towards performing at KS3 as the means to present and assess outcomes, meaning less emphasis on tasks that require a creative response from students.

But what place does creativity – both in creative approaches to undertaking tasks, and in demonstrating creative and musical outcomes – play in classroom approaches to music learning at KS3?

What might be inhibiting creativity in the classroom at KS3?

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE AT KS3: TIME AND RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

With the school year neatly divided into six half terms, and previous National Curriculum sample units based on six- to eight-week schemes of work – not to mention the recent trend towards carousel models in schools and two-year KS3 – there has traditionally been an emphasis on dividing the music curriculum into a series of topics that run across KS3.

A typical outline for a six-week or half-termly scheme of work might be based on a framework like this:

- Students are introduced to the genre or topic.
- Students listen to some music from the genre or topic.
- Students play some music from the genre or topic.
- Students compose their own pieces.
- Students perform the outcomes and are assessed.

Thinking point: although the constraints above mean that many schools are fixed within this structure, where might opportunities to embed creativity present themselves in the structure of your music curriculum? What might be the advantages and obstacles to extending schemes of work beyond a six- to eight-week timeframe?

The RISE framework for creativity has been developed to allow teachers to audit current practice, finding examples of what they currently do well and where areas might be to offer more opportunity for creative thinking and creativity. It is a cross-curricular tool, so also has relevance to link across subjects and faculties where appropriate.

WHAT ARE THE STUDENTS DOING AND LEARNING: IS THE BALANCE RIGHT?

Thinking point: what is the balance between performing, listening, evaluating, composing and creating music within the topic you're currently teaching at KS3? How does this balance out in the context of the GCSE weightings of 30% performing, 30% composing, 40% understanding and applying learning through the listening exam?

CREATIVE THINKING AND BEING CREATIVE

'Adults can also demonstrate their creativity, though it is suppressed through work and education. In principle, everyone can be(come) creative! Three factors contribute to be(com)ing creative: skills, environment (including means) and motivation.' *Nurturing Creative Thinking (Kampylis and Berki, UNESCO 2014)*

Constraining learning within schemes of work doesn't allow for much time to get into the necessary depth that might support creativity.

Furthermore, there is a risk that if each unit follows the same structure, students might become bored and disengage.

Thinking point: can you list all the different ways that students are learning within one scheme of work?

- Are there opportunities for reflection, discussion, evaluation?
- Can time spent in groups, at the start of the lesson or on homework tasks if set, be better used to allow for variety?
- Is the amount of musical content right?
- What is the balance between breadth and depth within this scheme of work? Could students do fewer tasks in more depth to result in a more creative response over a longer period of time?
- How could you make the structure of this scheme of work different from the one before in terms of the lesson activities students will be engaged in?

DEFINING AND EMBEDDING CREATIVITY

'All school subjects are creative and can be taught and learnt creatively; all environments can create and offer multiple, albeit very different, opportunities for students and teachers to reflect creatively; all teachers, like all people, can be creative in their teaching practices.' *Nurturing Creative Thinking (Kampylis and Berki, UNESCO 2014)*

In 2014, UNESCO released a report containing eight principles for nurturing creative thinking that form a good starting point for things to try out in the KS3 classroom:

1. Students' creative thinking can be nurtured in all school subjects and curriculum areas, and especially in cross-curricular activities.
2. Influence creative thinking through well-designed learning spaces.
3. Increase the use of open-ended questions.
4. Engage learners in meaningful and authentic activities.
5. Collaboration enhances creativity.
6. Make efficient use of educational technologies.
7. Allow for mistakes and sensible risk-taking.
8. Learn how to assess and reward creativity.

The remainder of this resource will provide ideas for how to embed some of these principles into existing schemes of work and suggest new projects and activities to try with KS3 classes. The aim is to keep the focus on finding a balance between students being creative and having time to think creatively about what they're doing in lessons, with the aim of ensuring that what is one of the most creative subjects in schools allows for students to express themselves creatively from the outset.

Cross-curricular opportunities: reflecting on current practice

There are many challenges in undertaking cross-curricular projects at KS3 that stem from issues of timetabling, setting, logistics and just time to plan and discuss together. However, a good first step in embedding creativity might be to audit what is shared in terms of how learning currently happens across subjects.

The natural place to start is between arts subjects, often labelled as presenting the most opportunities for students to be creative in their KS3 school experience. Identifying opportunities for creativity that already exist means that drawing on these across the subjects can ease time pressures through identifying and reflecting on what already happens.

At your next department or faculty meeting, take along a scheme of work and consider the following:

Opportunities for creativity: audit framework devised from UNESCO Nurturing Creative Thinking

Scheme of work		Subject area
Questions:	Notes:	Actions:
What are students learning? (eg a diverse range of skills and subject content following their own learning pathways)		
How are they learning? (eg learning approaches and methods such as problem-based learning, constructivism, self-organised learning, instructional design, game-based learning) What is the balance of activities and teaching approaches, and does this suit the needs of all students?		
Where are they learning? (eg in any location within school buildings – foyers, lounges, common spaces and corridors – at home, a youth club, or indeed in the street) How might this affect their ability to be creative with the task?		
When are they learning? (eg after formal school hours and at any age) Are there opportunities to extend learning outside of curriculum time?		
Who are they learning with (eg not only with teachers and classmates, but also with a range of other people, such as peers, experts and people near to or far from them, and by themselves with self-organised learning methods, etc) Is there any existing community practice or are there experts within the school that could be utilised?		
For whom and why are they learning (eg not just for themselves or for future employers, but also for their fellow citizens, society and industry, and for the world as a whole) How might this unit link outside of the requirements of the subject programmes of study and form reflection points for students as a result?		

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For units that are limited to curriculum time, the last three questions might open up discussion on how opportunities to support out-of-hours learning, enrichment or cross-curricular collaboration may present opportunities outside restricted teaching time to support students to be creative with the material they first engage with in class.

Getting creative with your space

CASE STUDY: ST PAUL'S SCHOOL, BALD HILLS, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Head of Music Kellee Green is a jazz pianist who plays regularly at gigs locally. She has been fortunate to be able to set up one of her teaching spaces as a 'live lounge' to give her students a taste of what it might be like to perform in venues where the atmosphere is less formal than they are used to when performing at school.

The school also runs an extensive programme of more traditional choirs, ensembles, orchestra and band as part of a thriving extra-curricular schedule, so the room is also used to rehearse the school orchestra as well as for classroom lessons.

Although not all teachers are fortunate enough to teach in a flexible space, the following are some starting points for considering how the environment in which students carry out tasks might be influencing how creative their responses can be:

- Classroom layout, and desks or no desks? Keeping the layouts fluid can keep students guessing. Desks suggest that lessons may follow the same format as other subjects with an emphasis on written work and teacher-led presentations. Removing desks can create an open space where students will be expected to participate in different ways, while setting up desks in 'party tables' can be suggestive of collaboration or group work within one larger space.
- Technologies and resources: creativity is often most effective through collaboration. Make sure that where possible, performance or rehearsal spaces allow students to face each other as they plan, play and rehearse, and encourage this from the outset in the way that you lay out your main learning or performing space.
- Easy access to resources to make finding what they need, setting up and using the spaces simple and time-efficient.
- Looking after the spaces: this requires a consistent approach and some time spent training up classes from the start, as well as allowing enough time for it during lessons.
- Displays: use of colour, inspiring images, quotations and student work can all facilitate creating a space for creativity.

Thinking point: as regular users of your classroom, practice rooms and maybe even corridors and cupboards, can you take an opportunity to devise some opportunities for student voices to feed into how they best feel they can learn creatively? As well as uses of the various spaces, ask how displays or storage and setup of resources might support them to be more open to being creative. Ask either individual students, or teams of 'music leaders' tasked with helping to make the best use of space.

Be more 'open-ended'

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

There are many opportunities to use questioning in a typical KS3 music lesson, but not always enough time to make it a particular focus in every lesson. With time often taken up by logistics, equipment, playing, moving, organising and explaining, it's tempting to keep questions for assessment lessons, or as part of written tasks such as a listening activity or evaluation.

However, with much of the learning at KS3 happening in small groups, consider how questions might be used to support learning, give feedback and tease out what help might be needed.

In the context of nurturing creative thinking, the UNESCO recommendations suggest that '**open-ended questions help students develop creative thinking by applying, analysing, evaluating and synthesising information and knowledge**'. A list of open-ended questions are given that are designed to be adaptable across all subjects. But how could these be made more relevant to a KS3 music lesson?

Thinking point: work through the questions below, and think about how they could be applied to a scenario specific to a music lesson you've taught recently:

Scenario	Open-ended question type	Subject-specific questions
Students are working in bands to learn and perform a cover song. The teacher goes into the practice room to see how one group is getting on.	Questions that seek clarification, eg 'Could you explain further?'	Can you tell me what your aims are for the lesson today? Can you explain why or how you will do that?
Students are listening to a piece of music and have been asked to identify a change in dynamics.	'Can you give an example/ counterexample of...?'	Can you give me an example of how the dynamics changed in the first part of the piece?
Students hear an aria from an opera. Some students react by mimicking the singing or saying, 'I hate classical music.'	Questions that challenge assumptions, eg 'What do you think is behind this assumption here?', and 'Is this always the case?'	Why do we associate this sound with this style of music? Why do people have such strong views about this style of music? What has made you assume that this is 'classical' music?
Students have been asked to choose who plays which part in a performance of some reggae music. They are arguing because everyone wants to play the guitar or keyboard part and nobody is willing to play the drums or bass.	Questions that explore alternative viewpoints, eg 'What is the counterargument for X?', or 'Can/did anyone see X in another way?'	What would the piece be like if there was no bassline? Would the piece still be an example of reggae music if you play it on guitar and keyboard only? Is there a way that the whole group could solve this together?
Students are composing a chord sequence in small groups. They have been given a selection of eight chords to choose from but have only used four of them in the verse and the chorus.	Questions that look for implications and consequences, eg 'But if X happened, what else would result?', 'How does X affect Z?'	What would happen if you used E minor in the chorus instead of repeating the C?
Students are working in pairs on a music tech project. They have been given several loops and have been asked to organise and develop them into a new piece of music. The teacher notices that they have copied and pasted one of the loops part way through a bar which has shifted the rhythmic metre out of sync.	Questions about the question, eg 'Why do you think that I asked that question?', or 'Why was that question/problem important?'	What can you hear when you get to bar four? Why do you think I have asked you to listen to that particular section?

BEING CREATIVE WITHIN PARAMETERS VERSUS FREE COMPOSITION VERSUS A MIXTURE

We also often provide a list of parameters or restrictions that frame a musical activity from the outset. This is a good place to consider whether teacher planning has allowed space and support for a creative response. Parameters are usually linked to learning objectives and expected outcomes. As with open-ended vs closed questioning, the way that these parameters are set up, interpreted and assessed can all affect how much opportunity there is for students to offer a creative response. For example:

- Compose a melody using these five notes. It must use call-and-response structure and start and end on the note C.
- Build a rhythmic pattern choosing from the following ten examples.
- Compose a rhythm with four beats in each bar using crotchets, quavers and minims and write it down.
- Using the notes from 'Ode to Joy', compose your own stepwise/conjunct melody.

The closed nature of these parameters doesn't allow for a range of responses that can open up really important teaching points. Students might ask:

- What happens if I use six notes instead of five?
- How does it sound if I don't end on the note C, and why does it sound different?
- How can I make my piece sound different from 'Ode to Joy' if I'm only allowed to move by step?
- If I try to make it sound different by moving up or down more within a phrase, is the overarching balance within the original melody lost?
- Why might this be an issue, and what does that tell us about why the melody known as 'Ode to Joy' was originally composed in the context of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony?

- Do the students know that it wasn't a little tune composed for keyboards but has a wider context, history and orchestral context than they may be aware of?

HOW TO MAKE PARAMETERS MORE OPEN-ENDED

Give the activity one 'creative trigger' that gets imaginations going, then add a list of open-ended parameters that rely on students making a choice. Then pick out some open-ended questions based on how students responded.

Overarching aim	Parameters	Questions
Compose a jingle that is catchy and 'sells something'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can only be 30 seconds long. • It can only use two chords (of your choice: think about why you chose them). • It can only use ten words (you can repeat them, they might rhyme, they don't have to, they need to get a message across). • You can include a riff as well but you don't have to. • You can sing, chant or rap, but you do need to have words in it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you sing back any bits of it – was it catchy? What made it memorable? • Did they make good choices over the chords they used? • What could they do next with the piece if they could extend into one minute long?
Compose a melody on a keyboard that has a beginning, middle and end, which the class can sing back to you afterwards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It needs to sound finished. Think about how to do that. • You can use black or white notes: think about what sounds 'right' to you, and work out which notes fit best and see if you can say why. • Think about dividing into sections and whether you want to repeat any of them to make it more memorable. • Try not to make it too long or too complicated or the class won't be able to remember and sing it back. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was that easy/not easy to sing back? • Was that task easy to complete? What are the challenges when composing melodies? • Did you draw on anything you already knew to complete the task, for example melodies you might have played or heard before? What did you 'borrow' from those?

CHECKLIST FOR OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND TASKS

- Allow enough time for students to explore a range of responses with teacher and peer support where needed.
- Keep tasks short and achievable.
- Plan time for the outcomes to inform the next stage in the process, rather than hurrying through activities to cram one big outcome into a six-week timeframe.
- Embed some flexibility into planning in case the activities start to lead in a completely new direction that requires additional learning, different resources, a change in expectation based on what students have created and how they have responded.

Engage learners in meaningful, authentic activities

There's always a balance to be found between the responsibility of the teacher to keep learning meaningful in the context of their music education, and engaging students in activities that they consider to be relevant to the outcomes they are working towards.

Establishing an ethos of threading student voices through planning and delivery of KS3 lessons is a good way to ensure that this balance becomes a shared aspiration, and one that may move and change with each year group as they move through KS3.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT STUDENTS' MUSICAL INTERESTS AND WHAT MOTIVATES THEM IN MUSIC

- Ask students to bring and share music with their group, class or with you.
- Ask students to devise and run a survey to find out more about the music their class likes.
- Set a task for students to choose one song that represents how they feel this week, then justify their choice. (This is a brilliant activity if you are re-roomed or have a cover teacher.)

- Allow students to take it in turns to choose the music the class come into each lesson.
- Create a class playlist of everyone's favourite song. See how many different songs appear on the list and if possible – within the safeguarding guidelines for use of technology and social media at your school – share it via an online streaming platform to start to identify that class's musical identity.

INVOLVING OTHERS

In terms of authenticity, it's hard to reproduce the experience of playing music in another style or genre without access to relevant instruments, or to a teacher able to teach in ways that may be traditional to the music. Reproducing gamelan music on tuned percussion isn't the same as experiencing a gamelan as a group. Although costs may be involved, consider these ideas:

- Approach your local music hub to see if they offer workshops led by community musicians.
- Check out local arts venues to see if there's an opportunity to link up with any of their events.
- Approach other schools who may have steel pans, samba kits or djembe and see if there is a way for your students to access them. You could even also borrow some lesson ideas from the other school as well.
- Put a shout out for any musicians among the school community, and see if they are able to support getting some new music into the school.

AND FINALLY...

- Give students an input into how they learn – replace task sheets that have a list of step-by-step activities and leave gaps for them to fill in themselves.
- Link to real-world events and news stories.

Case study: violinist Nicola Benedetti was quoted in an interview as saying that 'all youngsters should be exposed to classical music, whether they like it or not'. For homework, a Year 7 class was asked to write a letter to Benedetti agreeing or disagreeing with her statement and stating their reasons.

Collaboration enhances creativity

Working in groups has always played a part in how KS3 music is delivered. Music is a social activity, and making music together – whether that's working with an accompanist, playing as a band or small ensemble or jamming together as a whole class – is an important in keeping students motivated and building confidence.

However, there are a few considerations about how group work can be most effective at KS3 when taking into account friendship issues, varying degrees of prior musical experience, space and class size and available resources. Developing a set of guidelines specific to group work in your own department is important, and best done in collaboration with the students where possible.

Thinking point: how could you work with Year 7 students who may not have worked in groups before to identify and understand:

- the roles of the individual and others within a group?
- how whole-class music making and the contribution of individuals within a larger group can help to build an ethos for participation when they break out into smaller groups?
- how they might set up and run their own music clubs to support the extra-curricular life of the school?
- what the place might be of virtual or online collaboration for music, such as being able to listen back to work online and leave comments for others, or continue to make music together outside of lesson time?

Of course, it's also vital to be clear at what point the teacher steps in if groups aren't working well together. A good approach is to use whole-class activities such as warm-ups and ice-breakers to establish an ethos for collaboration and confidence with making music together, then find different ways to create small groups for breakout work, choosing between friendship groups, groups chosen by instrument, or by prior experience.

Other things to consider

MAKING EFFICIENT USE OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES

Consider how you might use the following:

- Social media networks
- School websites and blogs
- Google classroom, etc
- Integration of tech with live instruments
- Digital resources, play alongs, YouTube, etc
- Mobile technology and open access to apps and platforms for creating and sharing music

ALLOW FOR MISTAKES AND SENSIBLE RISK-TAKING

Creating a culture at KS3 where it's okay to play wrong notes is really important. If students lack the confidence to have a go, then there's nothing to build on. Make warm-ups and whole-class activities from the start, and use them to model and demonstrate how music is about playing, identifying something that needs to be improved, rehearsing and reworking, and then playing again.

Learn how to assess and reward creativity

Possibly one of the greatest challenges for music in formal education is around assessment. This quote from the UNESCO report serves as a useful reminder of what we're all aiming for at KS3 to ensure that students feel engaged and motivated, and get the most from the musical opportunities they have at school:

'When students feel pressured by evaluative surveillance, monitoring and other major features of assessment, their willingness to take risks and explore creativity becomes limited. But when assessment is constructive and focuses on self-improvement, the students are more likely to take risks, seek out challenges, and develop and contribute ideas that are both novel and useful.'

Try to provide constructive feedback and not criticism.

SUMMARY: FOUR STEPS TO BEING MORE CREATIVE AT KS3

1. Audit what you and those in other subject areas are already doing. Identify where students have opportunities to be creative, and check the balance isn't skewed too much towards performing.
2. Use student voices. Find out more about their views on creativity in music and how the space and resources available can be used to their maximum potential.
3. Keep outcomes and questioning as open-ended as possible.
4. Be flexible and creative as much as possible in your teaching.