B. J. Music Ed. 2000 17:3, 227–245 Copyright © 2000 Cambridge University Press

Examining experiential differences between improvisation and composition in children's music-making

Pamela Burnard

PBBurnard@aol.com

This article focuses on children's experiences of differences between improvising (i.e. creating spontaneous single-event performances) and composing (i.e. creating revised pieces). Eighteen self-selected children participated from a multi-ethnic, comprehensive Middle School in West London. Twenty-one weekly music-making sessions were conducted over a period of six months. A model mapping qualitatively different ways of experiencing improvisation and composition is presented using data drawn from the analysis of in-depth interviews, observation and recorded performances. The categories also form the arrangement of a model where improvising and composing are distinguished as being orientated towards (i) time, (ii) body, (iv) relations and (iv) space. These findings can be applied to the development of a pedagogy, which challenges some of the assumptions about what it is (and can be) to improvise and compose.

Introduction

'Composing' has become a key term used in curricular discourse resulting in a growing interest in how children compose. There have been many studies which analysed children's compositional products (see, for example, Loane, 1984; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Davies, 1992; Barrett, 1996), compositional processes (see, for example, Kratus, 1989, 1991, 1993; Upitis, 1992); small group compositional processes (see, for example, Loane, 1987; Wiggins, 1994; DeLorenzo, 1989; Emmons, 1998); and the assessment of pupils' compositions (see, for example, Salaman, 1988; Swanwick & Franca, 1999; Mellor, 1999).

Some researchers have referred to the term 'improvising' as a particular aspect or initial stage of composition (Paynter, 1992) whilst the opportunity to revise a piece has been considered more compositional in nature (Webster, 1992). In accounting for developmental difference in children's compositions, Kratus (1994) clearly distinguished between composition, as the processes of modifying and reviewing ideas leading to a replicable product, and improvisation, as the process of 'trying one new musical idea after another (exploration)' (1989: 17).

However, a broad definition of 'composition' is often applied in research to include improvisation as, for example, in the seminal study of Swanwick and Tillman (1986) for whom defined composition was considered to be 'the briefest utterances as well as more worked out and sustained invention' (p. 311). Davies (1992) collected 'invented' songs by children and went on to describe some of these musical processes as compositional in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nature when the songs were reworked or repeated whilst improvisational ideas appeared spontaneously during the generative course of a song. But like many researchers, Davies was not concerned whether the children were intentionally improvising or composing, nor was there exploration of the qualitative aspects of experience but rather how children worked the structure and form of their musical creations.

Reporting on children's compositional processes, Kratus (1989) separated out the processes they use. He recorded variations in the amount of time children spent engaged in exploration, development, repetition and silence. Kratus (1991) went on to characterise children's compositional strategies as having 'high-and-low-success' (i.e. demonstrating cohesion, and closure, craftsmanship and replication). He concluded by saying that 'the success of the product appears to be dependent upon the nature of the process' (p. 102). Kratus (1994) concluded that 'subjects who engaged in greater amounts of development, repetition, and silence tended to create songs with greater cohesion and more frequent pattern use' (p. 128). The implication was that improvisatory processes manifest less concern for cohesion and coherence. It seems, however, that when the conventional practice of Western art music is used as the yardstick to analyse the generative course of, in this case, inexperienced children who had not trod this musical pathway, the process of improvisation is too often devalued if it does not lead to a replicable product.

The extent to which these developmental and psychological approaches provide an adequate explanation of children's understanding of their experiences, in terms of the meanings they associate with improvising and composing, remains problematic. Perhaps this is because of the application of a 'top-down' view of the nature of musical experience. The Western art music tradition contains implicit frameworks defined by concepts such as musical end-points which form the basis of analysing children's music. However, these canons of Western art music may not necessarily resonate with or accurately represent children's understanding of their own musical practice. This 'adult' approach emphasises musical properties and outcomes which may not resonate with or be relevant to children's creative achievements (Glover, 1990).

If we look to the studies of early childhood musical activity there is more evidence of understanding children's musical understanding from the observation of music-making in naturalistic settings. For example, a small of number of studies have focused on the exploration of children's experience of playground singing games (Marsh, 1995), children's spontaneous musical play (Moorehead & Pond, 1978; Pond, 1981; Littleton, 1998) and musical meaning as ascribed by children in the general context of their lives (see Blacking, 1967; Campbell, 1998). More recently, Kanellopoulos (1999) reported an ethnographic study of ten eight-year-old Greek children's conception and practice of improvisation. He concluded that 'the children learned that music-making is an open-ended process' (p. 189) and that children experience improvisation as a joint creation in which the intentionality is shared. Thus, children's improvisation may entail a specific orientation or quality of engagement which grows out of a young player's need other than forms of expert or adult practice.

Loane (1987) attributed particular significance to children's group compositional practices. He presented a descriptive analysis of twenty-nine compositions created by children aged between eleven and fourteen years in groups containing four to six children. Loane reported that when the children composed they created whole structures which

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

transcended the characterisations of improvising and composing. He concluded that no fundamental distinction need be drawn between improvisation and composition. Loane (1987) argued as follows:

> Should we say that the making of a piece of music involves one act of 'creation' or many? Certainly, there seem to be many moments at which creative decisions are taken, as a composer tries different ideas, discards one, modifies another, extends a third. But always the ideas are related to the imaged whole of which they are to form part, and this strongly suggests that the musical whole is the product of just one act of creation ... So [that] each 'momentary' act of creation is ... the single outcome of the whole process. (p. 33)

On the one hand, it could be argued that if the experience of improvising is always subsumed as a means to a compositional end, as is usually the case in group compositional processes, then the outcomes may well not be perceived as distinct entities. On the other hand, improvising and composing may represent dialectically related or separable acts of creation when, at the most fundamental level, children reflect on action. Moreover, reflecting on the significance of the activity may create a pedagogical tool for understanding the relationship between improvising and composing.

It is not surprising that teachers often have little confidence or understanding of how these two phenomena might be either (a) pedagogically differentiated (Bunting, 1999); (b) effectively implemented (Paterson, 1999); (c) appropriately valued (Mellor, 1999) or (c) integrally tied to the interaction between performance-based theories and creativity itself (Sawyer, 1997). Whilst the pedagogical issue concerns the relationship between, on the one hand, building improvisational skills and techniques and, on the other, the mechanisms supporting the compositional process, it may be useful to think about the significance and uniqueness of experiential qualities that underpin engagement in these activities.

To date, there appear to be no studies of children's improvisation and composition which examine what constitutes the relationship between improvising and composing as grounded in the lived meanings of children's musical worlds (i.e. informed by what the children say about their actions and musical understandings). In current educational discourse, the lack of emphasis on what is specific to children's musical experience does little to acknowledge the diversity of musical worlds that characterise our classrooms. Widespread recognition of the need for new ways of reconceptualising (theorising about) our understanding of pupils' experience is long overdue.

Research methodology

The two main aims guiding the present study were: (a) to describe the nature of children's experience of improvising and composing by observing in what ways children participate in these music-making activities (i.e. the noetic concepts addressing action-related 'how' issues); and (b) to consider the dimensions along which improvisation and composition are related by asking children to reflect on 'what' it is to improvise and compose (i.e. the noematic meaning-related 'what' issues). This article addresses the 'what-aspect' consisting of the processes by which children make sense of different kinds of activity and experience by focusing on what is concrete, different and unique to improvising and composing. The paper draws upon in-depth interview data to facilitate further understanding of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

experiential differences between improvising and composing from the child's perspective. In addition, musical exemplars are presented (see the text boxes which provide analytical descriptions and convey the chronology of performances and specified track on the accompanying CD[1]). These exemplars serve to illustrate specific qualities embedded within children's experience of differences between improvisation and composition.

Research context

The study took place in a multi-ethnic, comprehensive Middle School set in West London, England. Eighteen self-selected twelve-year-old children participated in twenty-one weekly music-making sessions over a six-month period. The ethnographic strategies of observation (twenty-one hour-long music-making sessions), interviewing (individual and focus group), and the examination of artefacts (200 recorded performances), produced data for analysis which was informed by grounded theory procedures (as described by Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

According to Hennessey and Amabile (1988), and other writers on researching children in context (Silvers, 1977; Gardner, 1982; Grave & Walsh, 1998), to facilitate the study of children's interpretative understandings of their own creativity appropriately, it is preferable: (a) to research children in a situated context which is distinct from the normal classroom; (b) not to impose strict parameters which may inhibit them. Thus, a single context was researched involving a group of children engaged in inventing music as an extra-curricular lunchtime activity which would not be regulated by the demands of a school curriculum.

Given that the research priority was to observe child-directed activity (i.e. where starting points, time limits or other constraints were contra-indicated), a consensus view of the terms 'improvise' and 'compose' was gained from the initial interview data. From the outset, the children considered improvising to be an immediate single-event performance of newly created music made without prior rehearsal, whilst composing referred to a revised piece.

My role as participant observer, as a 'peripheral' member (Adler & Adler, 1994), was that of listener and enquirer rather than a mediatory relationship of teacher or assessor who set task parameters. Thus, by taking a flexible stance and being sensitive to the experiential qualities that inhere children as improvisers and composers, what constitutes their interpretative understanding and experience of self-determined, child-directed activity became the research focus (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Interviewing techniques

Because lived experience has a temporal structure, insofar as memories and even near forgotten experiences influence the way one thinks and acts, I decided to conduct individual and focus group interviews over a prolonged period across a variety of related contexts. This led to the fieldwork being divided into three phases (which were referred to as the Early, Middle and Late Phases) of which the Early and Middle were followed by focus group interviews to promote reflection. Comparing the children's recollections of their personal experiences from individual interviews before the study and then their

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reflections after the project was considered an essential technique for gaining phenomenological insights (Van Manen, 1990). The different aspects of children's understandings, from intentions to purposes, provided the focus. Specific details on the elicitation tools developed and the use of video-graphic stimulated recall (i.e. techniques for watching themselves on video and reflecting on action, see Silvers, 1977) have been reported elsewhere (see Burnard, 1999, and Burnard, 2000).

Introducing the children

Of the eighteen children, there were twelve boys and six girls. Fourteen children had received instrumental tuition and five had completed graded examinations; four had received no formal instrumental training. Only one child did not have a musical instrument at home. There were fourteen of British descent, two Afro-Caribbean and two Asian children.

Theoretical underpinnings

Dewey (1934) invited us to think of experience in terms of certain generic traits which included the psychological qualities of completeness, uniqueness and unifying emotions. Distinct from the traditional psychologists' views of learning about *how* people experience things, Van Manen (1990) advised taking a human science approach by questioning *what* are the ways in which we experience the world (p. 5). Researching lived experience means tapping the unique nature of each human situation and coming to elucidate the 'how and what' of experience by making sense of how a person experiences something and what a certain phenomenon comes to mean as encountered 'in our actions, in our body, in our relations and in the things around us' (Van Manen, 1999: 69). Drawing extensively from Merleau-Ponty (1962), he argues that a set of lifeworld themes is indispensable for systematically reflecting on and mapping experiential qualities. These themes, comprising 'lived time', 'lived body', 'lived relations' and 'lived space', form structural aspects of experience based on accounts, constructed representations and personal constructs of children and adults (see Fig. 1).

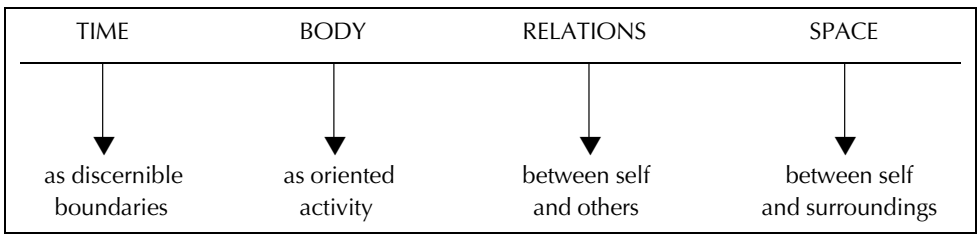


Fig. 1. *Lifeworld themes which form lived experience*

This article, however, does not attempt to summarise the constant comparative method of analysis and its coding procedures. What it does provide, however, is my conceptualisation of the phenomenological themes that were drawn from in-depth interviews. The starting point for comparing items in each category, then drawing up categories and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

comparing categories, was located largely in the language used by each child expressed in sessions and interviews. First, a comparison was drawn between the kinds of issues raised by the worlds of time, which temporally situate the contexts of improvising and composing. A second comparison was made concerning the particular orientation of body movement as gestures used to construct an immediate performance or revised product. A third comparison concerned relations as children in interaction between self and others (musical-social activity) and between self and a sounding object (i.e. musical instruments). The final comparison concerned the space in which transactions between player and surroundings become environments, in which are depicted the totality of overlapping performance elements.

These themes proved especially useful in relation to the comparative analysis being undertaken because they: (i) applied to different ways of experiencing all forms of musical behaviour; (ii) served as a means to relate observable aspects of improvisation and composition; (iii) provided a tool for illuminating varied forms of relationships between improvising and composing; (iv) retained the complexity of children's intentions whilst offering a way to illuminate the nature of musical experience; and (v) offered an approach which gave a personal and shared aspect to the mapping of experiential themes (Husserl, 1970).

A number of member-check techniques were used to enhance the credibility of findings. These included the use of triangulation of data sources, the children's final reflections (see Burnard, 2000) and the use of independent referees to examine, re-interpret, reformulate and evaluate the reliability of the thematic categorisation of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In seeking more than one researcher to read the same original data, a phenomenographic procedure of interjudge reliability was adopted (see Marton, 1996). Given the compromise of providing a kind of synopsis of the distinctive stances taken by the children, I will report on the findings of children's ways of experiencing improvisation in relation to composition.

Findings

Lived Time: from *immediacy* to *recursion*

When improvising, the children indicated a willingness to accept uncertainty and participate in ways for which 'having no time to think' was played out as a kind of pre-reflective playful impulse which felt like 'you had to dive in', 'play as you feel' or 'just follow your fingers'. The flow of the impulse seemed to rely upon relinquishing the opportunity to stop, think and plan and reflect what they could do in the moment. The instruments selected were user friendly in terms of ease of sound production. One child (Ashton), spoke of the special world of time and how it influenced his first solo improvisation (Middle Phase). His notion of 'time' is based on the immediacy of performance. He comments:

> You're not waiting on other people or listening to what everyone else is playing. You're in your own time. I was listening to the sound of the instruments. I did some things over and over again and other things I changed by playing a bit harder and louder and then slowing down

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> sometimes. It was a big surprise to suddenly hear the tambourine. I could feel it rattling when I played louder. It felt good diving into it. [Source: Focus Group Middle Phase]

Immediacy did not necessarily mean that ideas were always played out 'suddenly' nor that an immediate context meant engaging in a sequential act of thought followed by action, but rather, the consequence of immediacy was to 'dive' into multi-sensorial ways to be reactive and interactive at each special moment in his time. The function of a felt 'immediacy' is clearly reflected in an exemplar of matching musical wits in a duo improvisation that follows (see CD Track 1; and Burnard, 1999, for musical transcription).

Improvisation (duo) on tuned percussion (Recording No. 151)**:** The performance leads off with Ashton playing a four-note motive consisting of rising triadic tones and a whole-step *a* repeated on soprano xylophone. At the third repeat Maria enters playing simultaneously the triad differentiated by inversion and register. After several rising and falling configurations Ashton introduces a variant three-note stepwise motive using Maria's rhythmic pattern. There is some metric ambiguity from which Maria emerges by asserting leadership in a call-and-response exchange. The meter changes to a compound time when Maria repeats the motive over a dotted rhythm that is immediately adopted by Ashton. The imitative sequential repeats chart an ascending course of sequences of matching motives playing in a call-and-response texture. Ashton breaks the pattern with a descending step-wise episode that progresses forward into a further tug-of-war. Leadership is deferred to Ashton and the challenge continues with alternation of different versions of the three-note motive. The performance, lasting 93 seconds, approaches closure with some slowing before Ashton plays a rhythmic elongation of the motive, on which Maria conclusively doubles the final tone.

[CD Track 1]

This performance illustrates an interplay of listening and responding to a felt immediacy in which the players seemed to challenge each other in a tightly co-ordinated and self-organising format (or volley inferring a competition) based on one brief musical motive. The material was shared and exchanged allowing continuous and motivic transformations. Such strategies included the use of imitation, inversions, retrograde inversions and sequential passage-work. That both players felt self-assured enough to swap ideas and roles was illustrated by several leadership shifts when one player allowed time and space for the other.

The children spoke of points in the temporal landscape at which 'getting in', 'carrying on', and 'stopping' occurred. These temporal points in the journey began by 'getting in'. This was the point of entry or starting point evident in all improvisations. In many group improvisations the direction of the play was set by the leader who played a group beat which functioned as a firm metric foundation for others to attune to and metrically align with ('fit' and 'follow'). 'Carrying on' seemed to refer to the way in which time was lived through and responded to. This level of responsiveness seemed to arise as a by-product of the felt immediacy from moment to moment in which the sequence of time past ('getting in'), time present ('carrying on') and time future ('we were looking for a place to stop') seemed to be an essential condition of engagement.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The *piece I play* reflects what is known

Composing seemed to be an activity, which was relived 'over and over'. Most compositions became time-tested pieces in which certain ideas recurred, as in repeated borrowings from a previously known piece, or in a repeated set of operations as if 'remembering it' was assigned by regular practice and the 'revisiting' of ideas formed the boundaries of a piece. How they made *use of time* was generated within a context specific to their objective of composing ('making a piece I play'). 'Having time to think' allowed for the setting of goals ('to think what the piece is') and expectations ('worrying what people might think'). The personal investment of time taken in the making of a time-tested piece was, for many children, about showing what they could make and what they envisaged as an endpoint or musical outcome. In the setting and completion of the piece there were time-based issues, which constituted every step along the compositional way.

For Loreen, who made her first composition for piano and percussion in Session 5 (and followed it by three later versions performed over as many months), the 'actual piece like the pieces [she] practice(s) at home', as she described it, was made during an hour-long working session based on a set of rules that, for her, constituted a traditional model of a piano composition. The 'piece' featured the assemblage of symmetrical sections, divided into six distinct sections (A, B, A1, C, B, A). There was a clear delineation between the beginning (A B A1), middle (C) and end (BA) sections. The major structural components of the piece featured the use of repetition and alternation of contrasting sections. Her intention was, she said, 'to develop it to be an actual piece and not as an ideas' piece'. In my questioning I attempted to reveal the difference. She pointed out that 'an ideas' piece is like just messing around. It's when you don't stop . . . actual pieces are the ones I play and keep'. I ask her whether her actual piece always sounds the same. She replies:

> I keep playing it right through over and over until I'm pretty sure I've got it pretty well right and it's stuck in my head. [Source: Focus Group Early Phase]

Commenting on the value of having time to take full responsibility as composers, Chloe, who co-composed a six minute piece called 'The Life Cycle of A Flower', made this comment:

> Once we had decided to make up a piece together we spent the whole day on it. When we performed it didn't sound like anything we had done before. It sounded like an actual piece. It's not like you're in music where you have to do this and that. We could do what we wanted and it was ours. It's because it wasn't a little piece that you play and forget, it was like doing our best stuff in it. [Source: Focus Group Early Phase]

Fashioning pieces from known melodies and rhythms 'picked up' 'by ear' from popular music or instrumental repertoire was a common experience expressed by many of the children. Not surprisingly, they seemed to store-and-draw ideas from known and existing pieces. For example, Lia performed several compositions for guitar that featured the use of familiar musical material. One particular 'made-up piece' provides an insight into her prior training on guitar, her familiarity with popular music and her notion of composition as the building blocks from which her identity as a guitarist emerges.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Composition for guitar (Recording No. 66)**:** This composition, lasting 55 seconds, features three main sections. The first section (A) opens with a phrase which features an ascending three-note motive chained to a descending four-note motive both of which are repeated before being developed. A link of rising and falling quavers connects to the second section (B), which alludes to a borrowed tune (Spice Girls song called 'Mama') based on a descending stepwise motive over a syncopated rhythm. It is here we realise that the opening phrase uses the same pitch in varied configuration and rhythmic patterns. New material is introduced in the third section (C) comprising a variously configured four-note motive to end with notes of longer duration. [A (link) B C] **[CD Track 2]**

This was a piece 'anchored' in all that she knew (the 'know what') and found playable (the 'know how'). This involved a conscious recognition of choices through which performance technique and performance repertoire played major parts. These skills and orientations were mirrored back through the piece which, as a piece performed 'without any one else', displayed her present limits and potential as a guitarist, at this time, integrated with qualities to which she aspired. As Lia said:

> You have to think about what the piece is. Sometimes you might just play anything but when I play a piece that I made up I worry about what people might think and so I try to do it as best as I can . . . With my own guitar piece though, I made it up by myself. Like this is a made-up piece that I can show everyone myself – not with someone else. I started with bits of a song I can play. These twiddled bits got me started and then I thought about some different ideas and anchored it by playing it over a bit at a time. [Source: Focus Group Middle Phase]

We could argue that in thinking about 'what the piece is' she values composing as a way of articulating what she knows and is able to do. Playing 'anything' leaves her with less to 'worry about' whilst 'a made-up piece, that I can show everyone myself', means giving prominence to the expectations of the piece by taking 'quite a bit of time' to 'anchor it'. Thus, composing depended upon the time taken and the instrument played to call up certain musical conventions as reflected by the expectations of both player and audience.

In this way, composing seemed to be characterised by prior knowledge and past experiences lived and relived in a *recursive* temporal world orientated to recollecting where, as Adrian explained 'we know the song and we've put it together [having] changed some bits'. In this case, a borrowed pop-ballad was arranged in an *a cappella* vocal setting producing textural and timbral contrasts between solo and duo voices [CD Track 3]. Each successive performance of the song, of which there were four versions performed during the six months, involved a variation in interpretation and arrangement. Each version was reworked giving more prominence to deliberate manipulation and arrangement of musical elements of a known song that they all identified with and could retell.

Lived body: experiencing *continuity* or *reflection*

Along with the favoured choice being percussion instruments (see Burnard, 1999), an element common across children's discussions about improvising was the primacy given to continuity (i.e. 'carrying on'). 'Carrying on' seemed to originate as a bodily action,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which involved more than the mere physical act of sound-producing but rather, a multi-faceted way of playing (i.e. a kind of sensory-based activity).

First, in an ongoing dialogue played out between body and instrument, the children focused on a continuing pattern selection (where 'you play through without stopping'). They delighted in prolonged elaboration, self-absorbed with the continuous transformation of a melodic or rhythmic pattern ('I did some things in one hand and copied them in the other'). Second, focused on a flow of patterned movement, one child described her orientation in an improvised solo on log-drum when she said, 'I watched what each hand could do' as if to focus on the sight of sound as a way to attune to and augment patterns by kinaesthetically as well as visually monitoring how movements were made and patterns were played. Third, the 'feel' of a musical instrument often prompted 'moving all over it' for which discovering the kinaesthetic or felt sound directed the production of sound. This was illustrated by many of the players who delighted in the kinaesthetic sensation of changing beaters, alternating places to produce sound, and acting out playful movements during the course of a performance.

The following example [CD Track 4] conveys instances of multi-sensory gestures (along with CD Track 1) for which the continuous exchange and suppleness in responses between players relied upon the kinaesthetic, aural and visual monitoring of each other. This kind of attuning to each other, by remaining responsively alert and listening through the body, conveys a shared orientation to musical continuity.

Improvisation (duo) on tuned percussion (Recording No. 153)**:** Sorcha, playing bass xylophone, leads off setting a moderately fast tempo with a descending line of repeated notes across a dotted rhythm during which Adrian visually and aurally monitors Sorcha searching for a matching tone as starting pitch. At the repeat of this opening idea, he enters playing a rapidly repeated tone as a drone accompaniment, a stable platform on which Sorcha solos with a rising sequential motive. Adrian maintains the drone, shifting play from the left to right beater in preparation for adding a new timbre, the drum. Sorcha continues to aurally monitor Adrian's moves while he seamlessly transfers the rhythm from one instrument to another. Anticipating the intentions of Sorcha, he simultaneously doubles her rhythmic pattern, thereby converging at the point that marks a clearly punctuated segment. Another segment begins, marked by Sorcha and Adrian converging on the same rhythmic pattern. Sorcha repeats the pattern again, over which Adrian deviates from this playing a syncopated rhythm alternating beaters on the edge and middle of the drum. Adrian continues to visually monitor Sorcha signalling the end of that section by a convergence in rhythms, a tempo and dynamics. Another segment begins with Adrian who sets off playing a tuneful play on two neighbouring notes over a swing quaver whilst Sorcha plays intervals in varying contrary motions in a slower rhythmic tempo forming an accompaniment texture. The performance, lasting 59 seconds, ends with Adrian visually monitoring Sorcha as they approach closure cued by a slowing tempo. **[CD Track 4]**

Sorcha acknowledged important aspects of this 'felt' process when she said:

> He told me to start which made me the leader. So I led off, then, when I felt him change the rhythm, he'd already taken the lead. So, when he heard me do the beat, he then did the rhythm. Then we changed around and I did the rhythm while he did the beat. [Source: Session 17]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The question arises as to how musically inexperienced children can communicate continuously during performance. When interpreting the children's constructions of these events it becomes apparent that *musical continuity* appeared to be negotiated by means of auditory and/or visual monitoring and responsiveness.

You've got to like the feel of the instrument: reflecting musical biography

To many of the children, composing meant the making of a piece which reflectively focused on a particular kind of performance knowledge; one which would provide parameters for making 'a piece I play'. This involved a kind of reflective process in which ideas were found, focused, fixed and finalised circuitously. Composing as 'reflection' of the musical biography of the player is well illustrated in the collaboration between Sidin and Maria. This partnership was motivated by Sidin. Maria was the more experienced player and, as Sidin's newly acquired 'piano teacher', assumed a leadership role.

Composition for piano by Sidin and Maria (Recording No. 28)**:** This piece begins with an introductory harmonic motive that then accompanies a simple motive (G F♯ E F♯). The tempo changes before a middle section from which slower rhythmic and performance tempi lead to a pause announcing the oncoming return to the A section *a tempo.* Another tempo change ushers in a closing phrase of classical cues based on a tonic triad followed by tonic tones in descending octave leaps. [A A1 (link) B A Coda] **[CD Track 5]**

This composition illustrates the norms of conventions which are familiar to pianists. It features, as Maria describes, 'two main ideas' across 'four sections', complete with an introduction, coda, key changes, the use of alternation and repetition, and ends on a perfect cadence. There are four clearly delineated sections that use transitional links as time-points or markers. The links serve to function as time-points that direct the players to where they are located in the piece. They assemble sections, as we are told, according to a plan that was decided prior to starting work on the piano. Maria said:

> I figure out a couple of ideas first. Then I play them and Sidin makes something up and then we stop and talk. We keep starting and stopping and then going back over and over parts and then playing the whole thing through loads of times. [Source: Lunchtime interview]

The working process includes externalising decisions, feeding back opinions, reinforcing ideas, and making explicit the musical plans. The planning is made explicit by a process Sidin described as 'confirming' whereby they play and then purposively stop in order to share with each other feedback on the worthiness of an idea. As a revisionist strategy, 'confirming' appeared to be central to the formative process of composing.

Lived relations: experiencing *interaction* or *formation*

During an improvisation the children used a range of communicative gestures. A leader would provide cues for starting and stopping identified by a distinctive timbral quality or rhythmic pattern. Similarly, leadership challenges were often communicated instrumentally. Communicative gestures could take the form of matched and differentiated patterns

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as illustrated by the interactive routines in a duo improvisation recorded by Kelley and Ashton.

Improvisation (duo) on tuned percussion (Recording No. 129)**:** Ashton leads off playing a distinctive four-note motive, which features a recurrent syncopated rhythm. It is repeated six times before Kelley enters playing a transposed inversion of the original motive (f–g–a). She shadow-plays (sounding slightly out of synchrony) over Ashton's line playing various transformations drawn from Ashton's material. This forms a heterophonic texture. Ashton continues to use and re-use elements of his original motive in continuous evolving reconfigurations. The performance, lasting 47 seconds, concludes with a convergence as the opening motive is played in contrary motion. **[CD Track 6]**

Kelley's intention to play with converging possibilities was made clear in the following recount when asked what she was thinking about during the performance.

Kelley: We didn't face each other because we would have made each other laugh
Ashton: But I did look at her once because she seemed late coming in
Kelley: I came in. I felt like I was acting like a go-between by basically playing what he was playing backwards.
Ashton: Oh . . . flash – ey!
Kelley: When we were playing together I was mainly following what Ashton was doing by listening to him, that's all I could do, to listen to him and make sure I didn't take away from what he was doing.
Ashton: Yeah! See, she was hiding in my world.
Kelley: No, I was just there, alongside you. [Source: Session 16]

Kelley appeared to make musical connections consciously entering Ashton's 'world' where interaction became an environment for each other in which the focus of each player was to produce patterns of sound, which met and connected within a continuously interactive way.

The formation of *a piece:* mapping the musical terrain

Composing predominantly comprised the construction of mental models that 'fixed' ideas into structural sections that were then linked to produce the 'piece'. Using a predominantly aural-based approach, the assembled parts formed a structured whole. A compositional map of the musical terrain, based on aural imaging of the structure, appeared to facilitate memorisation. In the following commentary, Lia clarifies how she came to negotiate a starting point with her collaborative partner:

Lia: This was a quick piece that we did together in an afternoon. Katya had an idea which she wanted to use. It was that jumpy rhythm which Katya said 'sounds like running'. Then we talked about making our piece into something that sounded like a herd coming toward us. That's when we came up with the idea of going for a stampede of wildebeests.
Katya: We talked about the idea of animals eating and drinking, as a sort of calm section then some buffaloes come (like in 'The Lion King') and next everyone is in a panic running like a stampede.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lia: We settled on the first bit and then worked on the next bit. We wanted it to go into two bits. We started by playing around with ideas. We'd play and decide on an idea by playing it over and over and then try out other bits with it. We'd really get in to it for a while and then we'd have to stop, go back and play it from the beginning. [Source: Session 8] [CD. Track 7]

It seems that by setting musical co-ordinates on specific auditory points in the piece they assign formal significance to the plotted structure. This, then, becomes a shared way in which to aurally orientate (rather than negotiate as in improvisations) where they were in the piece and as a way to orientate each other. As evidenced in the repeat performances of this and other individually composed pieces, setting a clear musical structure provided clear temporal boundaries, and thus rendered the piece both memorable and playable.

Lived space: experiencing *shared* events or *a piece I play*

What characterises the way children narrated the journey of improvising was repeatedly referred to in descriptions of what was played, how it was played, when it was played and with whom. The experiential qualities emerged in the form of a definition of the surroundings or environments set by each other in which each performance was played out. Improvisation possessed a shared and negotiated space, which was more often filled with uncertainty as to the events which were to follow. This was a performance space in which the children preferred to involve each other within a framework which was shared as illustrated in the following trio improvisation recorded earlier in the Early Phase by Diane and Loreen (clarinets) and Ashton (metallophone), where each player seemed to develop subtle ways of responding to musical uncertainty.

Improvisation (trio) on clarinets and tuned percussion: This begins with Ashton playing a rising stepwise pitch pattern on metallophone. He starts in a fast tempo and quickly adjusts the tempo to slow. Loreen enters playing a low sustained tone that leaps a sixth to descend by step. Diane enters quickly adjusted from playing seconds to unison. Loreen leaps a sixth to hold a long note. Diane leaps down to an octave lower. They pause on these notes. Ashton weaves a descending line creating an harmonic anchor. Rhythmic activity increases as Loreen plays a series of stepwise notes in her upper pitch register. Diane responds with a counterpoint of independent rhythm in a descending line going lower. Again they pause on their last note together. Ashton introduces a new sonority – a roll (oscillating between neighbouring tones) to which Loreen imitates by sounding a trill. A glance is exchanged between Louise and Ashton. Diane goes on to play a cadential-type melodic pattern around the sub-dominant tone (signalling an approach to end) which is taken over by Loreen to play a three-note descending ritardando to the final tonic which is played at the octave by Diane. This is prepared by a synchronised pause (a breath) before the sustained tonic. Ashton plays one final slow rendition of his opening four-note pattern. (As the audience applauded, Ashton made a gesture that conveys his pleasure and pride in what was played.)

[CD Track 8]

There are no predetermined decisions regarding who is to start or finish. The relationship between players reflects a musical trust. Ashton describes it in this way:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> I didn't go into my own world. I thought it was unfair on the others. You have to be there together. I took a bit of a chance, but it paid off, as there were no serious collisions . . . You have to listen to what they are playing and listen harder to what you're playing so it goes together. What I tried to do was to keep on with what I was playing and . . . keep on thinking about what else I can do against them, and then I'll change it. Then by this stage my own ideas come into it. Sometimes I added some of my ideas and then they'd take bits of my ideas to play.
> [Source: Focus Group Middle Phase]

Significantly, the music becomes a meeting place defined by the shared space in which the musical discourse takes place. The character is of a musical event where 'ideas' cannot be 'take(n) back', and where a pathway is mutually established for the continuation of a shared, collective encounter. As Chloe described, 'it's not like it's your own piece'. Thus, the nature of improvising seems to exist within the joint action of an interactive musical event where the performance is neither mine nor yours but 'ours'.

You have to think what the piece is: ownership of compositions

The children used mental maps and models, (see Burnard, 2000, for children's drawings), which contained definitive structural signposts to act as temporal markers to facilitate memory. There was a strong correlation between the degree of structuring of a composition and the identity attributed to it, as for example, with an 'ideas piece' compared to a 'finished version of a quick piece', or a 'proper piece' and an 'actual piece'. The valuing of a composition was often apparent in the number of repeat performances, which reflected a pride to 'show everyone'. In this way, the 'piece' seemed to reflect the formalist act of composing often modelled on music-making drawn from instrumental training. The musical outcome varied from a time-tested 'proper' piece to a 'finished version of a quick piece'. How many times the composition was re-presented seemed to depend upon the distinctive stance adopted by the child.

For example, there were five repeat performances of compositions that were originally premiered in the Early Phase (between Sessions 5 and 7). In Sessions 9 and 10 repeat performances of four compositions were given by Tim, Loreen, Dinali and Sally, Sorcha and Chloe. These performances, first recorded approximately a month earlier, come after Chloe's request to 'play our other piece because we spent so much time making them perfect'. These pieces were described as, 'not like you're in music and you have to do this and this' (Loreen) or 'little pieces' (Chloe) that you 'just play and forget' (Sorcha). Similarly, for Stevie, a composition 'should be a good piece that you want to keep' because 'you've had so long to think about it'.

These perspectives shed light on how, for many children, there was a deep significance in the knowledge that the definition of a composition was 'a piece I play'. This was particularly well illustrated at the final concert which was held in the school hall in the presence of the head teacher, class and music teachers, parents, family members and friends of group. At this concert nine children presented repeat performances of compositions recalled from the Early and Middle Phases. For Tim, 'performing my piece again' [CD Track 9] meant playing the fourth rendition of a piece first performed over five months earlier. The latter versions incorporated the same deliberate structural use of rests and pauses as definitive structural signposts forming a concrete entity with fixed relationship

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between sections. However, there were important variations in each performance. For example, he used: (i) a slower performance tempo; (ii) more pedalling and rubato effects to enhance expressiveness; and (iii) exaggerates staccato, legato and accentual articulations. These were interpretative performances of 'my piece' that communicated an overwhelming preoccupation with expressiveness in performance detail. The repeat performance highlighted the dependence of performance memory on formal musical relationships (i.e. having a fixed musical structure). However, the process of performance also rendered them as interpretative renditions. In other words, although the patterns of musical relationships were maintained there was evidence of some improvisatory elaboration and variation in performance expression involving variations in dynamics, tempi, graduations in tone colour, articulation, accents and sequential repetition.

Thus, even though improvising and composing may, at times, take similar routes as intersected performance outcomes, the performance space residing within their respective acts, can be different. Whereas improvisation was a multi-sensory activity which stands as an event existing in the 'now' based on an interaction between physical movement and sound in which 'we all play', the compositional map more often contained definitive structural signposts that acted as temporal markers to facilitate the re-presentation of a product or 'a piece I play' which was in a sense objectified by the owner or owners whose musical biography it reflected. This is not to say that when these children improvised there was no product. The point here is that from a child's point of view, it would seem that the meaning of improvising lies in the intentional activity of a time-based event actualised through interaction and orientated toward continuity.

Synthesis

This article addressed the ways in which the children differentiated experientially between improvisation and composition in terms of the language used, as well as in their actions and musical outcomes. It appears that giving the children the opportunity to improvise and compose allows their musical being to explore the meaning-related qualities which contextualise their own music and music-making on the basis of prior experience, musical preference and intent. I have outlined three forms of relationships to represent the orientations of children's improvisations and compositions. These forms describe the structure of children's musical experience. For a more detailed discussion focusing on children within the study who perceived improvising and composing as related or indistinguishable events, see Burnard (2000). A model depicting children's musical experiences can be constructed using a continuum linking improvisation and composition. Subsequently, these activities can be seen to overlap by virtue of exhibiting similar characteristics. However, improvising and composing can be perceived as distinct entities according to the context and manner in which musical activity is orientated. This interrelationship is illustrated in Figure 2.

From a child's perspective, the relationship between improvisation and composition can be experienced as: (i) distinct forms manifest as differently orientated activities (the overlapping area); (ii) an interrelated form based on a functional relationship (adjacent to the overlapping area); and (iii) an indistinguishable form where no distinction is made apparent (the outer areas). The lifeworld themes (as discussed earlier) relate to: (i) lived

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

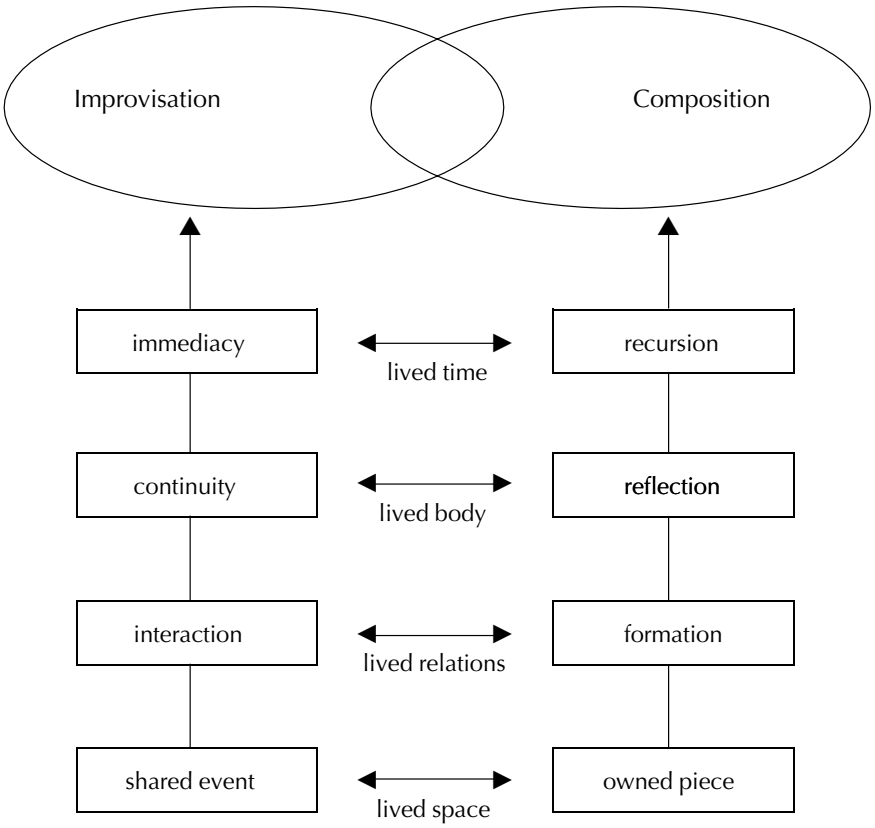


Fig. 2. *A model of the relationship between improvisation and composition*

time, (ii) lived body, (iii) lived relations, and (iv) lived space. Each theme is polarised using analytic categories as a tool for articulating differences set along a continuum.

A principal finding in this study was that these children did not experience improvising and composing along one single continuum but rather along several concurrent multi-dimensional continuums. The diverse nature of children's experiences and their understandings of each phenomenon as well as the ways in which different aspects of the relationships were experienced are inextricably linked to their intentions. Children's experiences of improvising and composing appear to be a function of the context in which they show themselves as negotiators of shared and owned forms of music-making.

Implications for classroom music educators

What is the relevance of this re-conceptualisation of the relationships between improvising and composing to teaching (or facilitating) improvisation and composition in classrooms? This research indicated that children often create music within the context of what they

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

already know. Children can talk eloquently about their own musical experience when their creativity is cherished and musical beliefs are respected and accepted. A model of pedagogical practice must evolve that acknowledges the importance of exploring the potential of *both* improvising and composing to evoke surprisingly separate, yet related, worlds. The relationship between player and audience must be characterised by musical trust so as to enhance and support creativity. Equally, we need to encourage children's natural capacity and thirst for creating music in ways that are authentic and risky, unrepeatable and unpredictable as well as the repeatable and predictable.

Inevitably, teachers have their own personal and musical constructs that constitute improvising and composing which in turn influence the content and activities they employ in the classroom. However, teachers need to understand the limitations of their own conceptions about improvisation and composition and to reflect on how they value children's music. Additionally, they should allow pupils to invent *their* own ways of improvising and composing. We, as teachers, need to be willing to take risks and to nurture the creativity which exists in everyone.

If our aim as music educators is to give a central role to creativity in music-making then we need to provide varied opportunities. Specifically, the children should: (i) improvise and compose in varied settings; (ii) make decisions independently as well as collaboratively; (iii) work in groups which vary in size and membership; (iv) have the opportunity to select from a range of instruments including those upon which they have had formal training; and (v) encourage children to support ('scaffold') each other by nurturing an environment of mutual trust and support. Simply, the teacher should facilitate the expression of and reflection on the pupil's experience without continually placing unnecessary limits on their musical worlds.

Perhaps, music education should be a little less focused on the acquiring of adult constructions of knowledge and skills and allow a greater scope for children to focus on their experience of time, body, relations and space as ways of learning through improvising and composing. If we truly value children's musical practices it may result in teachers becoming researchers and learners themselves as they observe and engage in the musical worlds of children. One consequence of this approach would be a school music pedagogy, which was transformative in nature because it resonated with the children's view of themselves.

Note

1 The recordings referred to in this article will be included on a CD to be issued with the *BJME* in 2001.

References

ADLER, P. A. & ADLER, P. (1994) 'Observational techniques'. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

ATKINSON, P. & HAMMERSLEY, M. (1994) 'Ethnography and participant observation'. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage.

BARRETT, M. (1996) 'Children's aesthetic decision-making: An analysis of children's musical discourse as composers'. Doctoral dissertation, Monash University, Australia.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

BLACKING, J. (1967) *Venda Children's Songs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
BUNTING, R. (1999). 'Teaching composing and improvisation', *National Association of Music Educators Magazine*, **2**, 23–6.
BURNARD, P. (1995) 'Task design and experience in composition', *Research Studies in Music Education*, **5**, 32–46.
BURNARD, P. (1999) 'Bodily intention in children's improvisation and composition', *Psychology of Music*, **27**, 2, 159–74.
BURNARD, P. (2000) 'How children ascribe meaning to improvisation and composition: rethinking pedagogy in music education', *Music Education Research*, **2**, 1, 7–23.
CAMPBELL, P. (1998) *Songs in their Heads: Music and its Meaning in Children's Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
DAVIES, C. (1986) 'Say it till a song comes', *British Journal of Music Education*, **3**, 3, 279–93.
DAVIES, C. (1992) 'Listen to my song: a study of songs invented by children aged 5 to 7 years', *British Journal of Music Education*, **9**, 1, 19–48.
DELORENZO, LISA, C. (1989) 'A field study of sixth-grade students' creative music problem-solving processes', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, **37**, 3, 188–200.
DEWEY, J. (1934) *Art as Experience*. New York: Capricorn.
EMMONS, S. E. (1998) 'Analysis of musical creativity in middle school students through composition using computer-assisted instruction: a multiple case study', *Dissertation Abstracts*, DAI-A 59/02, 441.
GARDNER, H. (1982). *Art, Mind and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity*. New York: Basic Books.
GLASER, B. & STRAUSS, A. L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
GLOVER, J. (1990) 'Understanding children's musical understanding', *British Journal of Music Education,* **7**, 3, 257–62.
GRAVE, M. E. & WALSH, D. J. (1998) *Studying Children in Context: Theories, Methods, and Ethics*. London: Sage.
HENNESSEY, B. & AMABILE, T. (1988) 'The conditions of creativity'. In R. Sternberg (Ed), *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary Psychological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
HUSSERL, E. (1970) *The Idea of Phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
KANELLOPOULOS, P. (1999) 'Children's conception and practice of musical improvisation', *Pscyhology of Music*, **27**, 2, 175–91.
KEMP, A. E. (1990) 'Kinaesthesia in music and its implications for development in microtechnology', *British Journal of Music Education*, **7**, 223–9.
KEMP, A. E. (1996) *The Musical Temperament: Psychology and Personality of Musicians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
KRATUS, J. (1989) 'A time analysis of the compositionally processes used by children aged 7 to 11, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, **37**, 1, 5–20.
KRATUS, J. (1991) 'Growing with improvisation', *Music Educator's Journal*, **77**, 4, 35–40.
KRATUS, J. (1994) 'The ways children compose'. In H. Lees (Ed), *Musical Connections: Tradition and Change*. Proceedings of the *21st World Conference of the International Society of Music Education*. Auckland, New Zealand, Uniprint: The University of Auckland, 128–41.
LINCOLN, Y. S. & GUBA, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Enquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
LITTLETON, D. (1998) 'Music learning and child's play', *General Music Today*, **12**, 1, 8–15.
LOANE, B. (1984) 'Thinking about children's compositions'. *British Journal of Music Education*, **1**, 3, 205–31.
LOANE, B. (1987) 'Understanding children's music'. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of York.
MARSH, K (1995) 'Children's singing games: composition in the playground?' *Research Studies in Music Education*, **4**, 2–11.
MARTON, F. (1996) 'Cognosco ergo sum – reflections on reflections'. In G. Dall' Alba & B. Hasselgren (Eds), *Reflections on Phenomenography: Towards a Methodology*? Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 163–88.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press

MELLOR, E. (1999) 'Aesthetic Perception in Music Education: Assessing Pupils' Compositions'. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Leicester.
MERLEAU-PONTY, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
MILLS, J. (1991) *Music in the Primary School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
MOOREHEAD, G. E. & POND, D. (1978) *Music of Young Children*. Santa Barbara, CA: Pillsbury Foundation.
PATERSON, A. (1999) 'The creative dream: composition in the classroom', *National Association of Music Educators Magazine*, **2**, 27–9.
PAYNTER, J. (1992) *Sound and Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
POND, D. (1981) 'A composer's study of young children's innate musicality', *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, **68**, 1–12.
SALAMAN, W. (1988) 'Objectives and the teaching of composition', *British Journal of Music Education*, **5**, 1, 3–20.
SAWYER, K. R. (Ed), (1997) *Creativity in Performance*. London: JAI.
SILVERS, R. J. (1977) 'Appearances: a videographic study of children's culture'. In P. Woods and M. Hammersley (Eds), *School Experience: Explorations in the Sociology of Education*. New York: St Martins' Press.
STRAUSS, A. & CORBIN, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: Sage.
SWANWICK, K. & FRANCA, C. (1999) 'Composing, performing and audience-listening as indicators of musical understanding', *British Journal of Music Education*, **16**, 1, 5–19.
SWANWICK, K. & TILLMAN, J. (1986) 'The sequence of musical development: a study of children's compositions', *British Journal of Music Education*, **3**, 305–39.
UPITIS, R. (1992) *Can I Play You My Song?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
VAN MANEN, M. (1990) *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. The University of Western Ontario: Althouse.
WEBSTER, P. (1992) 'Research on creative thinking in music: the assessment literature'. In R. Colwell (Ed), *Handbook of Research in Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Schirmer.
WIGGINS, J. (1993) 'The Nature of Children's Musical Learning in the Context of a Music Classroom'. Doctoral dissertation University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. No. 9305731.

Musical examples on CD

Track 1 Improvisation (duo) by Ashton & Maria on tuned percussion
Track 2 Composition for guitar by Lia
Track 3 Composition for voice by Adrian & Ashton
Track 4 Improvisation (duo) by Adrian & Sorcha on tuned percussion
Track 5 Composition for piano by Sidin & Maria
Track 6 Improvisation (duo) by Kelley & Ashton on tuned percussion
Track 7 Composition for percussion & voice by Katya & Lia
Track 8 Improvisation (trio) by Ashton, Diane & Loreen
Track 9 Repeat performance of composition for piano by Tim

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310 Published online by Cambridge University Press