Towards an Inclusive Secondary Music Education: The Role Played by Teacher Engagement in Two Mainstream-Special School Music Projects

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Abstract

Secondary school music curricula often alienate pupils because of their limited relevance to pupils' future lives and their experiences of music outside school. Moreover, music continues having to justify its place in secondary school settings. With an objective of expanding music educational thinking and increasing music's social relevance and usefulness, parallel case studies were used to explore, among other concepts, teachers' engagement in two integrative secondary mainstream-special school musical projects. Small's concept of 'musicking', which asserts the centrality of relationships in any form of musical performance, underpinned this research. In exploring the notion of an inclusive, socially just form of musicking, achieved through the musical integration of secondary mainstream and special school pupils, this paper outlines some hierarchical relationships in the projects influencing participating teachers' engagement. In such projects, mainstream and special school teachers' strong emotional engagement and their sense of self-efficacy were found to be important in enhancing or limiting the future likelihood of similar integrative projects. Suggestions for augmenting teachers' self-efficacy and for future research in this under-researched field are offered.

1. Introduction

This paper bridges the two fields of inclusion and music education, and aims to begin addressing the lack of research on music-based projects in secondary schools involving mainstream pupils working with special school pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD). Despite positive changes in disability 'models' and the increased inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in UK mainstream school classrooms, pupils with SLD are still

largely excluded from working with their mainstream peers, particularly at secondary level. In addition, in many special schools, musical resources may be limited. From mainstream pupils' perspectives, their unfamiliarity with people with learning difficulties and disabilities may be a significant factor in engendering fear, mistrust and misunderstanding [1]. Providing mainstream pupils with opportunities to work with their learning-disabled peers may help foster familiarity and diminish fear within the relatively protected environment of a school. In addition, integrative projects may help to increase mainstream pupils' understandings of their disabled peers' different ways of learning, working and communicating.

My recently completed doctoral research explored two mainstream-special school integrative music projects in terms of the engagement of the teachers leading each project (the 'lead teachers'), the interaction between mainstream and special school pupils, and the feasibility of such projects in secondary schools. Small's concept of 'musicking' [2], which asserts the centrality of 'relationship' in musical performance, underpinned this research. The projects themselves involved mainstream and special school pupils working together for one hour a week for ten weeks, and being taught by teachers from both schools.

In this study, inclusion (a difficult, even 'slippery' concept to define) described special school pupils' access to mainstream music teaching and resources, their *participation* in music making with their mainstream peers, and their very *inclusion* in this activity. Their musical participation was made possible as mainstream and special school pupils worked together on their projects. The projects themselves also had the potential to foster or enhance mainstream pupils' understandings of learning difficulty and disability.

The overarching question for this research was whether music might be used to achieve social and relational outcomes (described in the Introduction's first paragraph) over music education's more usual objectives, such as the furthering of pupils' knowledge 'about' music, improved instrumental performance, and the meeting of specific attainment targets. Would teachers be willing and able to work towards social outcomes *through* music, given the current emphasis on pupil assessment and achievement? These reflections called into question the values that music teachers attached to their teaching, as well as their engagement in the music making of mainstream and special school pupils.

This paper therefore focuses upon the lead teachers' engagement with their respective projects, found to be crucial in determining each project's perceived success. It also suggests some possible associations between the ways in which lead teachers engaged with their projects, and the relationships and interaction between mainstream and special school pupils. Setting the research in context, a brief review of mainstream and special school music education is provided, and documented music-based studies of mainstream and special school pupils working together reviewed.

2. Background

Mainstream secondary school music has long been documented as problematic [2], [3]. Pupils often engage willingly with music outside school but find school music inauthentic or even boring [4]. Despite a wide range of musics now being introduced into the formal curriculum, the inherent values of Western 'classical' traditions (underpinning much of trainee music teachers' education) are still promoted, resulting in many pupils becoming alienated from music in school [3]. Relatively few teachers engage with popular or non-Western musics that more closely reflect many of their future pupils' musical experiences and preferences [5]. While there is, ostensibly, room for creativity, the requirement for accountability across the secondary age range means that teachers are under sustained pressure to demonstrate pupil achievement, often through improved levels of musical performance. The auditioning and selection of pupils for school concerts this often necessitates can leave some pupils feeling inadequate and unmusical [2].

In special schools' music plays an important part in the lives of most pupils [6], yet music education for pupils with SLD is a largely invisible area in terms of relevant research and literature [7]. Many generalist teachers placed in charge of music in special schools have little or no musical background or qualification [6]; it is possible that such teachers may, as do many generalist primary school teachers [8], lack confidence in teaching music. Mainstream teachers too, have their own concerns about teaching pupils with SLD, with many lacking the knowledge and understanding of how to match their instruction to such pupils' learning characteristics [9], significantly limiting these pupils' participation [10].

Although integration is closely linked with participation, very little empirical research exists on secondary school integrative music projects involving pupils with SLD working with their mainstream peers [11]. In Moger and Coates reported briefly on such a project, which aimed at greater involvement of special school pupils in their local community and mainstream pupils' increased sensitivity towards their special school peers [12]. Its brevity meant that it lacked much methodological information. A much later study explored changes in mainstream pupils' perceptions of disability after working musically with a group of special school pupils with SLD [13]. Otherwise, performing arts projects aiming at fostering inclusion and examining pupils' changes in perception have involved drama [1; 14] and dance [15], both included in Small's concept of musicking [2].

3. Music and musicking

Music is widely held to be beneficial for people of all abilities, ample evidence existing to permit the likelihood of universal musicality [16]. Every baby in the womb experiences the rhythm of the maternal heartbeat, of movement, and the musicality of its mother's voice [17]. For special school pupils working with their mainstream peers, music thus forms an accessible, fundamental channel of communication, and a medium through which meaning may be shared even where spoken language is not possible [18]. School-based projects incorporating music, musical performance and dance (all encompassed within the concept of musicking) can give pupils with SLD the opportunity to develop their creative and artistic potential, both for their own benefit

and for the enrichment of society, advocated by the United Nations [19].

Small considers music as something people do, and his concept of musicking places performance (including practice and rehearsing) and relationships in pivotal roles when exploring, and analysing different forms of music-making [2]. From a starting point of universal musicality, the meanings of making and doing music – what Small calls musicking – are located both in the relationships between the musical notes and within participants' 'ideal relationships' as they imagine them to be during performance. The relationships are described as 'ideal' because they are right for the participants, as they themselves perceive them at the specific time and place where the musicking happens. 'Ideal' does not imply moral rightness here; musicking is not inherently concerned with valuation:

It is *descriptive* not *prescriptive*. It covers all participation in a musical performance, whether it takes place actively or passively, whether we like the way it happens or whether we do not... [2].

Small attaches great importance to gesture (e.g. body language, facial expression and vocal intonation) in the articulation and consideration of interpersonal relationships, making musicking an opposite framework for the analysis of teachers' engagement with work, colleagues and pupils, where several pupils' use of verbal language was either limited or absent.

4. Methodology

Following ethical review, two partnerships, Project A and Project B (involving four schools)

were arranged. Project A consisted of a co-located mainstream and special school, while Project B's schools were separated by a distance of three miles. Project B's teachers had never met; those in Project A had worked together previously on a short (three hour) music workshop. Both projects' mainstream lead teachers were music specialists, with the special schools' teachers having some musical experience but no formal musical training. Qualitative interpretive case studies incorporating ethnographic and narrative elements were conducted in parallel over one year, with the study being divided into three phases.

Before the projects (Phase 1), video-recorded observations of 'regular' music lessons in the individual project schools were carried out each week over a period of ten weeks. During the projects (Phase 2), a further ten weekly video-recorded observations of project sessions were carried out. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lead teachers before, during, and after the projects (Phases 1-3). This enabled comparison of the teachers' practice as they worked in their individual schools in 'regular' music lessons, prepared for the project, and worked together in the projects themselves. Phase 3 allowed teachers to reflect upon their project and validate their responses to the research findings. The mainstream and special school lead teachers in each project chose its content, and planned and led project sessions, each one of which was considered as a musical performance. Data obtained from the above methods were considered together with those obtained from support staff interviews, pupil interviews and focus groups, obtaining a triangulated picture of the projects from several perspectives.

Table 1. Project content

A: Integrated whole class and group work (percussion, singing, rap and keyboards) involved pupils learning and practising a popular hip-hop song based on Pachelbel's *Canon in D*. Teaching approaches used a 'rehearsal model,' aiming at correct notes and timings.

B: Pupils worked in integrated groups incorporating music technology, dance, percussion, songwriting and sign language, practising group performances. Project sessions began with whole class singing and signing, ending with groups sharing their work.

Both projects ended with a performance involving all four schools in the study, enabling participants to see, and reflect upon, another integrative project.

4.1. Engagement

The nature of human engagement in any activity is likely to consist of similar components whether adults or adolescents are involved in that activity, and so the literature on pupil engagement is cited here. Teachers' cognitive engagement was reflected by their willingness and motivation to exert the effort to master new skills [20] and their behavioural engagement, by effort, participation, and sociable collegial and teacher-pupil relationships [21]. Teachers' emotional engagement was demonstrated by their affective ties with others, and their attitudes towards, interest in and commitment to their respective projects [22]. Potentially, these components differed in intensity and duration.

4.2. Data collection

Video-recorded classroom observations allowed repeated review of the project sessions and enabled the capture of important non-verbal (gestural) data in context. The amount of textual data, including field notes from classroom observations and interviews, was extensive. To

facilitate data management, NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used [23]. Textual data were coded ('tagged' with coding references) in three stages, firstly with codes derived directly from the data and also from Small's musicking framework. The second and third stages enabled checking of coding definitions, the employment of codes introduced late in the first stages of coding, and the categorisation of these references into themes as they emerged from the findings.

5. Findings

The number of coding references describing each lead teacher's observed cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement during their respective projects provided strong indicators of the nature of their engagement. These coding references were associated with the criteria described in section 4.1. A brief summary of these findings is shown in Table 2. Project A's mainstream lead teacher retained her focus on assessment for her own pupils in project sessions and saw music specialist training as important in such projects (reflected to some extent by her special school colleague). Project B's lead teachers showed high expectations of all pupils' behaviour, were autonomous in taking responsibility for project planning and activities, were clear in directing these, and viewed musical training as less important.

Table 2. Lead teachers' cognitive engagement, Phase 2

Lead Teacher And project	Number of coding references				
	Focus on Assessment in teaching	Accepts/assumes responsibility	Clarity	Importance of music Specialist	High expectations of Pupils
Special school A	3	2	0	8	0
Mainstream school A	19	2	1	27	1
Special school B	0	7	18	0	3
Mainstream school B	0	13	12	0	5

Table 3. Lead teachers' behavioural engagement, Phase 2

Lead Teacher And project	Number of coding references					
	Working together well	Proactivity	More alert to context	Relationships: Openness	Relationships: Positive	Modelling positive behaviour
Special school A	2	11	1	2	6	0
Mainstream school A	0	4	3	2	0	2
Special school B	8	12	7	7	9	5
Mainstream school B	8	6	25	12	13	12

Table 3, above, shows that Project B's lead teachers worked well as a team and were constantly alert to what was happening around them in project sessions, dealing quickly with situations as they arose. Both projects' special school lead teachers were generally more proactive in project sessions in addressing pupils' needs.

Project B's mainstream lead teacher not only modelled positive behaviour for pupils in project sessions but also cultivated open, dialogic relationships with pupils and colleagues.

Table 4, below, indicates the lead teachers' emotional engagement. There are clear

differences between the two projects in terms of the lead teachers' observed and self-reported passion for their subjects (music and SEND), in conveying thoughtfully worded appreciation to all pupils for effort and achievement, and their attitude towards the project itself. The coding reference, 'Respect', refers to teachers' use of this word to pupils in class and in their interviews, or where they referred positively to their partner school colleague's specialist knowledge and expertise. It thus indicated not only respect but also empathic and carefully considered appreciation.

Table 4. Lead teachers' emotional engagement, Phase 2

Lead teacher And project	Number of coding references				
	Conveying appreciation	Passion for subject	Positive affect	Positive attitude	Respect
Special school A	0	1	6	0	0
Mainstream school A	2	0	10	1	0
Special School B	20	12	19	6	9
Mainstream school B	25	9	27	6	3

6. Discussion

Small states that '...somebody's values are being explored, affirmed, and celebrated in every musical performance, at anytime, anywhere' [2]. This school-based study inherently involved power relationships between teachers and pupils. Several other hierarchies influencing each lead teachers' engagement became apparent within each project as each teacher's ideas, attitudes and professional practice reflected her values concerning music education, and education generally. This notion of hierarchy provided a way of associating teachers' reconciliations of their inner values with the external demands of accountability and the interpersonal requirements of relationship. The hierarchies discussed below include teachers' prioritisation of activities, and hierarchies of knowledge, space, and of curriculum.

Batt-Rawden and DeNora [24] state that 'music's affordances are constituted through the ways music is framed or prepared for use'. In Project A, approximately 20 minutes were spent on semi-formal pre-project preparation, and over three hours in Project B: likely to indicate the importance that each project's teachers attached to it. Project B's preparation included a visit to Special School B's end of term pantomime, and a session where the mainstream school pupils were

introduced to (and learned how to use) simple Makaton signs, which they enjoyed. While all teachers planned their preparation sessions carefully, the time, empathy, and in particular, humour, shown by Project B's lead teachers is likely to have helped everyone taking part to work together more confidently. Staff seniority was also significant. Project B's special school lead teacher, as a member of her school's senior leadership team, was able to ensure that the particular support staff she wanted to attend each week could do so. She was able to choose support staff who were, like her, committed to and emotionally engaged with the project. Project A's special school lead teacher's relatively junior status did not permit this level of choice.

For music teachers, it is well documented that their identities fall on a continuum between musician/performer and teacher. Project A's mainstream lead teacher classed herself as a music specialist, and her special school partner as a non-music specialist, establishing an unequal power relationship within a project that the mainstream teacher considered as defined by its musical nature. Her special school partner appeared to accept this, and remarkably, never mentioned her own specialist ability. Implicitly this not only diminished the status of her ability, but also her

own perceptions of her ability (self-efficacy, described by Bandura [25] to contribute musically to Project A. In this way, subject specialism and musical knowledge was prioritised over pupils' wider educational and social development. In contrast, Project B's lead teachers saw curricular music's primary role as helping to increase pupils' confidence, teamwork and co-operation. For them, any prioritisation of musical expertise did not arise.

Project A's content was determined by its mainstream school lead teacher who remained primarily concerned for her own pupils' musical attainment throughout. At the time of the projects, this attainment was demonstrated by National Curriculum levels: a form of hierarchy. She used a scheme of work on hip-hop music that she had taught for several years at her school. Although both Project A's teachers had agreed that all pupils would probably enjoy this topic, Project A's special school teacher had not offered any further ideas during the project's planning stages. This may have been because she felt diffident in suggesting alternatives because she was both a non-music specialist and relatively junior teacher. In contrast, Project B's mainstream lead teacher willingly laid aside her regular way of working and its demands for assessment in favour of a creative form of musicking that privileged the importance of social relationships among all pupils taking part. Perhaps unusually for a music teacher, she was concerned with wider outcomes than musical ones:

[musical outcomes were] never for me the main goal which was thinking about them working together, breaking those barriers down and producing something that the students were proud of.

Considering hierarchies of space, architectural designs often reflect their builder's assumptions. The projects' classroom designs facilitated or constrained what went on inside them. Due to the newness of both mainstream schools, both their music teachers, as established subject leaders, had contributed to the design of their respective music departments. The classroom where Project A's sessions took place was heavily furnished with tables, computer workstations, musical instruments and equipment, restricting the free movement of teachers or pupils and encouraging a static manner of use. Tending to constrain relationship-building, this space instead facilitated transmission approaches to teaching [26]. It would have been difficult to accommodate a wheelchair in it or have a large group rehearsing there. Project B's

classroom provided a large free space, permitting extensive movement and freedom of use.

Where forms of hierarchy were less visible or even absent, notions of parity came to the fore. These were articulated strongly by Project B's lead teachers in their collegial equality. There was a parity of effort, similar levels of engagement, and a sense of 'give and take' as they worked during their project. Project B featured far fewer instances of apparent hierarchy than did Project A, whose teachers not only appreciated one another's expertise but also the constraints they were working within. Importantly, they treated each other's pupils as equals, and the class as an integrated whole, rather than two separate pupil groups.

6.1. Classroom climate and pupil interaction

The enthusiasm, appreciation and positive affect, i.e. the level and intensity of the emotional engagement of the lead teachers (indicated in Table 4 above), significantly influenced the social-emotional climate of every project session. Social-emotional climate in a music classroom is defined as a product of the external structures (the traditions and current constraints of music education), teacher-pupil interaction, and the perceptions both hold of those interactions [27]. Kindness and humour were apparent in whole-class and group work, with teachers, support staff and pupils all enjoying their new-style music lessons. Facial expressions in particular provided a valuable guide to each project classroom's social climate. Individual pupils' keenness to participate or a group's feelings during performance were generally bright and positive in Project B.

Interestingly, there was a (possibly significant) difference in the use of language by the lead teachers in the two projects. In field notes and interview transcripts, the words 'me', 'you', 'your' and 'them' were noticeably more frequently used when Project A's lead teachers engaged in classroom dialogue and answered questions, whereas Project B's lead teachers were more likely to use such terms as 'us', 'we' 'our'. This may, with the implicit message they carried, have influenced the interactions between the mainstream and special school pupils in the two projects. Project B's mainstream pupils appeared to show an empathic striving towards their special school peers. It is something that is worth consideration in the form of further study.

7. Conclusion

The power relations described above can be addressed through the fostering of mainstream teachers' willingness and ability to see pupils with SLD (and their own music educational practice) differently. Certain characteristics in both special and mainstream school teachers may need development for them to participate actively and effectively in similar projects. Addressing mainstream teachers' concerns about implementing inclusive practice is crucial in developing their sense of self-efficacy, which in turn strongly influences their engagement not only in such projects but also all their teaching.

Further research is required to determine the most effective way to develop such characteristics as self-efficacy when teaching pupils with diverse abilities. Mainstream-special school partnerships may enhance generalist specialist school teachers' confidence and self-efficacy beliefs in teaching music in the context of music-based integrative projects. Mainstream music teachers' perceptions of their ability to work with pupils with SLD may also be addressed in this way. Their comfort levels in working with such pupils can - and indeed should - be increased through appropriate training and working with such pupils. While integrative projects demand considerable confidence in participating teachers, they should not be ignored or laid aside because of the challenges they undoubtedly pose. The obstacles are not insurmountable, given teachers' commitment, and their willingness to try.

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9. References

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