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# CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY MUSIC

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### **Abstract**

Creative music-making is considered a key process in community music practice. One of the underlying assumptions of community music as an intervention is that everyone has the ability to make music – all sections of the community have creative potential. Group improvisation (Higgins & Campbell, 2010) and composition (McKay & Moser, 2005) are examples of community music approaches that are based on creative, collaborative group work. However, creativity in community music is not often explicitly examined or defined in the literatures. This chapter reviews current community music literatures on creativity and specifically examines the conceptualisation of creativity in relation to ten rhetorics of creativity (Banaji et al., 2010; Chappell et al., 2016). My literature analysis shows that in the community music literatures there are references to several creativity rhetorics (democratic and political; ubiquitous; wise humanising creativity) and various areas of usage (musical processes, leadership processes and personal qualities). I conclude by recommending further research to refine and deepen the understanding of creativity in community music and explore the implications for practitioners and researchers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores existing concepts of creativity in community music by analysing a selection of community music literatures. Considering the prominence of the term ‘creativity’ in descriptions of community music, I argue that we could benefit from a clearer articulation of creativity in the community music context. I use rhetorics of creativity (Banaji et al., 2010) as a way to differentiate between types of creativity. How one understands creativity reflects one’s attitude, values and political orientation. The way in which creativity is important in the field of education and the arts (the source of much recent writing on creativity) but also in community music, which intersects with education, public policy and the arts. It has implications on community music practice to the extent that it influences how projects and workshops are designed and implemented and how their goals are articulated. Therefore, through this chapter I hope to shine more light on the conceptualisations of creativity in the field of community music and to offer a basis for critical reflection and differentiation. This adds to a growing critical analysis of the terms used in community music, such as ‘inclusion and inclusivity’ (Yerichuk & Krar, 2019), or ‘disadvantaged community’ (Turner, in press).

Through conducting a literature review, I have analysed the use of the word, the relationship to existing rhetorics of creativity and the reflection of the concept in pedagogical and artistic practices in the field of community music.

My key questions were:

- How is the term creativity used in the community music literatures?
- What processes in community music are described as creative?
- Which rhetorics of creativity are reflected in the community music literatures?

I reviewed publications based on two criteria: those that gave an overview or introduction to the field of community music and; literature that explicitly dealt with community music and creativity. In the literature analysis I included the introduction from the Oxford Handbook of Community Music (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018), chapters from the OHCM that explicitly deal with creativity (Brown, Keller, & de Lima, 2018; Burnard, Ross, Hassler, & Murphy, 2018) articles from the International Journal of Community Music that explicitly deal with creativity (Leung, 2018; Michielse & Partti, 2015) and the books “Engaging in Community music” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017) and “Community Music in Theory and Practice” (Higgins, 2012). Engaging in Community Music (Higgins & Willingham, 2017) was particularly useful because it gives voice to a number of community musicians who were interviewed for the book about their practice. I reviewed how the term creativity was used and which rhetoric was reflected in the writing. The limitations of the scope of this chapter are obvious and I recommend further research encompassing a wider range of publications and empirical research on community musician’s interpretation and understanding of creativity. I would also recommend a wider discourse analysis (Keller, 2011) of the community music literatures, which would provide a basis for critical reflection in the field.

## CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY MUSIC

The word ‘create’ stems from the Latin *creare*, ‘to make’ or ‘to produce’. The word was first used in the context of the ‘divine creation of the world’, but it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the word ‘creative’ became associated with art. The word ‘creativity’ followed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Williams, 1976, p.82). In a general definition, creativity is described as requiring “both originality and effectiveness“ (being of value) (Runco & Jaeger, 2012, p.92). Recently, there has been a shift away from the idea of creativity as the (god given) gift of a privileged few, towards the idea that we can all be creative. Creativity now plays an accepted role in personal development and education is expected to support that process (Robinson, 2010). Creativity has been explored from diverse perspectives, including creativity’s social, cultural, democratic and personal dimensions: “In relationship to and distinct from the Arts; as social processes; as individual behaviours; as common to all or special to a few; and in degrees as well as in kind” (Sefton-Green et al., 2011, p.3). Craft and Jeffrey suggest that there has been a universalization of the conception of creativity. For them, the creativity discourse “operates in the economic and political field, acts as a vehicle for individual empowerment in institutions and organisations, and is used to develop effective learning” (Jeffrey & Craft, 2001, p.1).

While the creativity discourse has grown in recent years and the understanding of creativity has moved “from an individualised concept to one which is collaborative or group based, and which is ‘everyday’ in its occurrence” (Chappell et al., 2017, p.50), in community music the understanding and application of the term creativity varies. This chapter builds on the work of Banaji, who writes that “the public discourse about creativity is characterised by a lack of clarity that allows participants to gain the benefits from aligning themselves with conflicting or mutually incompatible ideas and views without being seen to do so” (Banaji, 2011). In the community music literatures, creativity is mentioned as a key area in community music practice and explored from varying perspectives. This includes creativity in musical processes, creativity in pedagogical processes, creativity as a quality, attitude or aptitude of a community musician. Indeed, many universities espouse creative processes as key strands in community music courses.

**Musical processes** that take place in community music activity are often described as creative, for example in creative music-making through group composition and improvisation. Gary McPherson (2010) describes the exercises for group improvisation as a way to support “expressive-creative skill building, encouraging the creative-expressive musical development and enabling creative experiences for individuals within groups”.

**Pedagogical processes** in community music workshops are described as creative in one of two ways. It can refer to a facilitator leading a group with the aim of enabling creative processes within it, using pedagogical strategies that enable the generation of creative musical material in the group. But it can also describe creative leadership in terms of making creative decisions in the process – making decisions that move away from the prepared plan in order to meet the social or musical needs of the group as they emerge – this is reflective of facilitation as an approach in community music.

**Creativity as a quality, attitude or aptitude of a community musician** can mean that community musicians should ‘be’ creative and have the ability to make creative decisions. “Facilitators need to be creative, able to improvise and ‘think on their feet’ ...” (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018, p.9). It can also mean being able to connect creatively: “The success of working with diverse groups is dependent upon Gerard’s ability to connect personally, creatively in a deep, open form of musical empathy” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p.15).

These three areas of creativity are usually **taught as creative processes in community music university courses and are considered key course components**. For example, at the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, there are modules in creative processes throughout the first year of the MA programme, covering workshop facilitation, project development, creative group music-making and facilitation strategies.

Higgins describes the recommended content of a creative processes course for community music students:

This course might concentrate on structures of creative processes – such as group work, planning, delivery, and strategy (...). This will provide students with a flexible set of (...) skills, techniques and strategies that enable group creativity (...) and the capabilities to evaluate creative processes and the framework in which they happen. A course like this would embrace a wide approach to the concept of creative processes and the relationships between particular musical skill sets. (Higgins, 2012, p.180)

Having demonstrated that there are three different areas in community music which are commonly described as creative (musical processes, pedagogical processes and personal qualities or abilities), I will now share the results of my literature analysis, which shows that creativity in community music is linked to a number of rhetorics, adding another layer of complexity to our understanding of creativity in community music.

## **RHETORICS OF CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY MUSIC**

In this chapter, I analyse concepts of creativity in community music via the “rhetorics” of creativity developed by Banaji, Burn and Buckingham (2010). Questions such as, “what functions do they serve?”, “How they are used, and in whose interest?”, underlie an analysis of rhetorics. Consequently, I am not investigating creativity itself, but rather what is being written about it in the community music literatures. The rhetorics of creativity are useful for analysing the use of the word creativity in community music literatures, its meanings and the way in which these meanings are embedded in policy developments and philosophical schools of thought.

The concept of creativity had a strong influence on education policy in the UK from 1999 onwards, which, under the New Labour government, led to the establishment of the Creative Partnerships programme, which aimed to increase creative teaching and learning in schools (Education, 1999). At the time, it was argued that creativity’s role in education was not central enough (Robinson, 2010). However, in recent years, the climate in the UK has returned to a stronger focus on the core subjects. In their publication for Creative Partnerships (arguably the biggest national programme ever implemented for developing creativity in education), Banaji, Burn and Buckingham (2010) describe nine rhetorics of creativity: the creative genius, democratic and political creativity, ubiquitous creativity, creativity as social good, creativity as economic imperative, play and creativity, creativity and cognition, the creative affordances of technology and the creative classroom. More recently, a number of authors have argued for the addition of the concept of wise humanising creativity (Chappell et al., 2016; Craft, 2014), as it covers an area not described by the nine rhetorics. In the following section, I have chosen to discuss four rhetorics with which I saw most (or least in one instance) intersections within the literature review.

**The creative genius** represents the idea of the great genius of the artist and their inspired original works of art. It sees creativity as a “special quality of a few individuals either highly educated and disciplined or inspired in some way” (Banaji et al., 2010, p.69). In the community music literature I have found no authors who present this understanding of creativity. On the contrary, most challenge the concept of ‘the gifted few’.

**Democratic and political creativity** “offers an anti-elitist conceptualisation of creativity as inherent in the everyday cultural and symbolic practices of all human beings” (ibid. p.69). Community music resonates strongly with this rhetoric, especially the idea of community music as an intervention. This is to be expected since, in the UK at least, community music developed from its roots in the anti-establishment and student movement of the 1960s. I found plenty of examples in the literature that resonate with this understanding of creativity:

With a heart towards co-authorship, collaborative group work, and a belief in the creative potential of all sections of the community, those who work in, and advocate for, Community Music often attempt to transform attitudes, behaviours, and values towards music-making through their practice. (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018, p.3)

Pedagogical strategies that enable the collaborative generation of creative musical material in a group setting often reflect, through the democratic framework of the workshop, the same belief in democratic and political creativity.

**Ubiquitous creativity** is often described as “small-c creativity” (Craft, 2001): creativity, not in the sense of life-changing inventions or creative acts of a genius, but everyday acts of creativity. This is creativity in the sense of using it to find solutions and new possibilities. Next to democratic and political creativity and creativity and play, this rhetoric was referred to in many texts. It was used to describe leadership processes: “Facilitators need to be creative, able to improvise and think on their feet (...)” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p.73), and musical processes: “[...] Ubiquitous music activities do not encompass all that creativity can be. Rather they emphasize everyday actions in community settings and strive to include the following features in support of activating personal creativity” (Brown et al., 2018, p.137). Small-c creativity is reflected in writings about those pedagogical processes in community music workshops which require creative leadership reflective of facilitation: “Provide some examples of creative music leadership where the facilitator moved from the prepared plan in order to meet the challenges of the moment” (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p.87).

**Wise Humanising Creativity (WHC):** Along with other recently developed conceptions of creativity, that emphasize co-creativity and the ethical impact of creativity, conceptions of Wise Humanising Creativity “spotlight and challenge the dominance of Western-centric, marketized creativity, positing a more humanising ethically aware alternative which views children and young people as empowered creative contributors alongside adults” and “creativity as distributed between people, objects and ideas” (Chappell et al., 2017, p.51). Wise humanizing creativity is “conceptualized in the face of educational creativity/performativity tensions. WHC

articulates the dialogic embodied interrelationship of creativity and identity – creators are ‘making and being made’; they are ‘becoming’ (Chappell et al., 2016). I have added this rhetoric as it resonates with some current thinking within community music publications in terms of an emphasis on ethics, the balance between the individual and the communal, and a focus on co-creativity. For example, Kathleen Turner’s research explores how the language used to describe marginalised communities can act as a barrier between community musicians and participants, shape the power dynamics between them and consequently the focus of the music-making. Turner explores how, in community music projects, not only the participants change, but the practitioners are equally on a journey which changes them also, and argues that this needs to be reflected in the language used to describe community music projects (Turner, in press). This reflects the notion in WHC of co-creativity and viewing “children and young people as empowered creative contributors alongside adults” (Chappell et al., 2017, p.51).

Another area that resonates with WHC is the ethics of community music (Lines, 2018). The underpinning values, principles and ethics of community music are core to its practice, which is reflected in the literature:

Creativity is driven by inner motivation, imagination and vision. Caring is borne out of compassion for others, an act of nurturing, which in turn makes us aware of others in the community. Work, creativity and caring can become empathetic acts as we live out our lives within the perspective of inclusivity and hospitality. (Higgins & Willingham, 2017, p.65)

It is through this structure [hospitality and ethics] that community music facilitators and participants are entwined in creative music making with the potential to produce events. (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018, p.10)

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

This paper gave me the opportunity to review the literatures explicitly with regards to community music and its relationship with creativity. I found that not only does creativity describe a range of aspects of community music practice (musical processes, pedagogical processes and personal qualities), but also authors refer to a number of creativity rhetorics.

Why is this important? The dominant discourse sometimes shifts as a result of public policy conditions and this, in turn, influences funding conditions for community music projects. For example, when I worked as a community musician during the late 2000s in the UK, the creativity discourse as promoted by the Creative Partnerships programme was very prominent and provided me with access to well-paid work exploring creativity in formal education. While I was passionate about the work I was doing, at the time I was not deeply aware of whose discourse of creativity was being supported by my work or my own position. I was grateful to be working in the field, following my passion, working with children, young people and teachers.

I hoped my work was making a difference, and I often felt that it subverted unproductive institutional cultures - for example, it allowed and nurtured the development of a critical voice in schools. Even if I didn't buy into every aspect of the dominant rhetoric, I was glad to use the opportunities the work gave me to make an impact. As a freelancer, I didn't have the luxury of time available to research, think or write about the underlying discourses, and I had not yet experienced the shifts in public policy that naturally happen over time. Even with the benefit of hindsight that many years of experience provides, that period in the UK still stands out in terms of the quality of the work that was being developed.

However, I do think that I would have benefited from a clearer understanding of whose rhetoric I was supporting. I would have liked to have been able to position myself clearly and critically and to develop my practice accordingly, because I have since discovered that tensions can arise when we are not clear about the rhetorics attached to our use and understanding of important words.

There can be tension and misalignment between the rhetoric underpinning one's work and the rhetoric underpinning the conditions of its funding. For example using the arts to generate employment reflects the rhetoric of the economic imperative: this could be seen to undermine the foundational principles of community music, which are more aligned with the democratic and political or play rhetorics of creativity.

These examples show the importance of a deep understanding and critical reflection of the words we use. But we must take care that, in doing so, we do not unknowingly support goals that are not in line with the underpinning values of community music and our personal values. Fuchs (2014) support this when he says that too much naivety and sloppiness in defining the words we use can lead to being supportive of neo liberal agendas, without intending to do so. Here it is important to acknowledge that most community musicians survive on time-limited contracts and are dependent on public funding for their projects and their livelihood. Hence, for pragmatic reasons, practitioners may feel obliged to describe their work in the language of the funder. Taking time to reflect on the implications of that language and the theories behind it is a luxury few can afford. It is easy to see how external conditions, such as public policy and related funding conditions, can determine the language used when writing about community music practice. This results in tensions within a practice that, on the one hand, considers itself a boundary walker, critically questioning power relations and aiming for empowerment and cultural democracy, but on the other hand needs to survive. Perhaps the subversive ideals that fuel the work are still implemented, regardless of what is written on paper.

Community music provides a theoretical lens for approaches to music-making, which draws attention to issues of critical importance in our times, such as cultural democracy, inclusion and living democratic citizenship. Creativity is often used to describe an idealistic aspect of community music practice. Tensions can emerge between these ideals, the reality of the practice and a lack of clarity regarding the concepts that are used to describe or justify the work. I hope this chapter contributes a first step to some clarification and further critical reflection.

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