‘This Is My Truth, Now Tell Me Yours’: Emphasising Dialogue within Participatory Music

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Abstract

As a group, musicians have traditionally been resistant to conceptualising their educational practice in participatory settings. Rather than continuing to strive for an elusive consensus, this paper suggests we would do better to see our work in a different way, using the concept of dialogue to enable all of the diverse perspectives on music educational practice to have validity, as well as giving us insights into the kinds of teaching and learning exchanges that go on in Participatory Music (Turino 2008). In particular, the concept of dialogue invites us to re-appraise some of the traditional dichotomies associated with music and music education – e.g. access / excellence; process / product; ethical / technical – so that they too, can be seen as positions which ‘widen dialogic space’ (Wegerif 2012).

Introduction

For as long as I can remember, there has been debate amongst our community of, ‘musicians who think of themselves also as teachers’ (Swanwick 1999, i), especially those working in non-formal participatory settings, over what we call our practice and how we talk about it. Rather than being able to reach a consensus about what we think it is, we tend to be more inclined to agree on what it is not. ‘Definitional uncertainty or reluctance is perhaps surprisingly common’ (McKay and Higham 2012, 5), and repeated attempts at drawing the diverse community of practitioners together under a clearly defined set of practices, methodologies and approaches have often only served to create conceptions which exclude as many as they encompass i.e. those whose practices do not correlate closely with the practices towards the centre of any given definition. Adorno recognises that, ‘the fundamental character of every general concept dissolves before the determinate existent’ (Adorno 1973, 85), and so it goes: in striving to articulate what unites us, we often merely emphasise our differences.

Accordingly, resistance to conceptualisation has become a feature of the community, not just in the field of community music, but in Participatory Art in general, a phenomenon noted by Owen Kelly as far back as 1983: ‘‘in refusing to analyse our work, and place that analysis into a political context, the community arts movement has placed itself in a position of absurd, and unnecessary, weakness’ (Kelly 1983, 3). Thirty Years later, and still ‘many have been resistant to defining [community music], believing that such a statement would not do justice to the endeavour of community music’ (Higgins 2012, 3).

However, resisting definition of our practices by appealing to ‘its fluidic or labile identity [as] a strategic advantage’ (McKay and Higham 2012, 5) has also left us without the means to fully understand what it is we do, and how what we do relates to what others do, other artists, other practitioners. As Lee Higgins observes,

> ‘[community music] practitioners developed a rich tapestry of practical projects but found it difficult to find time and space to critically reflect. The inheritance of this ‘tradition’ has meant a dearth of scholarly and academic writings pertaining to community music, community musicians, and the worlds which they inhabit’ (Higgins 2012, 7).

Critically, such resistance has also made it harder for us to explain our practices to others, making it harder for others to understand them. If you know what community music (CM) is, you do not need me to explain it to you. However, if you do not know what it is, you may imagine or assume all kinds of instances of music-making of impoverished, or even dubious, quality. In my experience, people often do make such assumptions, although equally as often, they’re unfounded.

Despite this resistance to conceptualisation, we know there is commonality in our work, and we also suspect that it will help us to talk about our work with those from outside our practices, and for those practices to be taken more seriously, if we were able to articulate them more consistently and coherently. Higgins’ presentation of a theoretical framework (Higgins 2012, 10–13) to describe community music practices in philosophical terms is a bold move, but one that has been much needed. His framework encompasses Derridan notions of disjunction and heterogeneity: ‘community music sets out to encourage musical access through intervention and a resistance to closure’ (p.11), alongside Levinas’ ‘humanist’ principles emphasising community music’s ‘orientation toward the distinctive features of individuals and what each person might achieve rather than a universal method or approach’ (p.11), and it serves as a provocative invitation to view community music from a new perspective. Regardless of how far one agrees or disagrees with it as a framework, the important point is that it is a clearly articulated position which other commentators can respond to, and it invites critical reflection in order to engage with it. In that sense, Higgins is championing a new territory for the discussion of community music that goes beyond just a discussion of its practices, but urges us to consider it in conceptual terms.

The impetus for developing the perspective contained in this essay is, at least in part, in response to Higgins’ framework. My purpose in this essay is neither to agree nor to disagree with that perspective, but rather to suggest another way of looking at not only the work, but also the theories emerging about it, of which Higgins’ is a pioneering perspective, but surely not the last word. There is talk of the need for a ‘new paradigm’ for Participatory Arts in order to, ‘enhance the quality of people's engagement in arts-led activity and the arts, and create a more professional and confident sector whose work is valued and seen as important’ (Artworks 2014a), and these developments are therefore timely.

I would like to suggest that a unifying feature of our work is the role which dialogue - and a dialogic approach to pedagogy - has in understanding what it is we do, and why we do it. In true dialogic tradition, I do not offer it as an attempt to present any definitive perspective on these diverse practices, but rather as simply *a* perspective. As the title of this essay implies - with a nod of thanks to the Manic Street Preachers whose album title they borrowed from the words that Aneurin Bevan was wont to use in concluding his speeches - dialogue allows for many different perspectives to have a voice in the conversation. In fact, the more voices there are 'telling their truth', the wider the dialogue becomes, and the more inclusive. Rather than seeing this as a fall into factionalism and disagreement, the notion of dialogue - as a pedagogy as well as a concept – has the potential not only to provide a helpful way of

thinking about some of the ways in which learning occurs in participatory settings, but which also help to resolve and unify the inconsistencies manifest in the diversity of our practices, and thereby enable everyone's perspective to be accounted.

Every community musician invented community music

Every community musician believes they invented community music. This bold and astute observation was made by Ben Imrye, a recent graduate of the Community Music degree course that I teach on at Sage Gateshead. As part of his dissertation on the relationship between formal and non-formal music education, he observed:

> 'During my time studying this field of practice, I have been offered various conflicting accounts of community music's development by professionals who were part of the community arts movement at this time. From one professional I was informed that there is evidence that community music tied in with the punk movement and was fighting against elitism and inaccessibility in music. From a different professional I was told that there has been evidence that community music tied into the experimentalist movement, fighting for creativity over learning pre-written repertoire. I have also been offered various other theories and opinions on the birthplace of community music as a movement, of which there were apparently four distinct and sparsely distributed locations, all claiming that 'they did it first' (Imrye 2013, 3).

The apparently contradictory positions implied in Ben's observations might well all be true, but should this inconsistency really trouble us? Moreover, is there a way of reconciling these apparent inconsistencies?

Certainly before *Participatory Music* (Turino 2008) - or community music (CM), or whatever name we choose to call it - found its way on to UK university syllabuses, the way that the practices evolved was in very situated and localised ways, often developing around key active musicians / artists with a social purpose. For every high-profile artist or organisation developing participatory work in the public sphere, there are probably tens more building solid yet modest practices, 'hidden' from broader 'communities of practice' in the way that Ruth Finnegan describes in 'The Hidden Musicians' (Finnegan 1989). I have heard Kathryn Deane from Sound Sense (Sound Sense 2014) express a similarly 'situated' history of community music, citing the various 'schools' of practice as discreet methodologies arising around various communities of key practitioners.

Perhaps the reason why a conceptual consensus has continued to elude our sector is because historically, we have assumed that such a thing is desirable, while at the same time not being satisfied with any definition which does not closely resemble or fully account for our own individual perspective. Such a thing is not possible; each of us inhabits situations as unique as the individuals and practices which constitute them, and we cannot infer universalities from the situated understanding we have acquired. We work away developing and evolving *communities of practice* in our own situations, but tend to discount their situatedness, believing instead that our work reveals more universal truths. It's little wonder, then, that there has been such resistance to conceptualisation in the sector. Because, 'we substitute concepts for what they represent, but no concept can ever capture the richness of the reality' (Crotty 1998, 132), concepts tend to exclude more than they include. To fully understand the diverse and ever-changing nature of Participatory Arts and its sub-practices,

we need to turn to more sophisticated ways of 'framing' it which both accounts for the diversity of those practices, without reducing them to mere concepts. The notion of dialogue provides such a conceptual 'frame'.

Of course, within any dialogue, there are always voices which are attended to more carefully, or which speak more loudly, or articulate a position more convincingly or skilfully, and it is a naturally 'situated' process that *communities of practice* will evolve around those individual voices. However, it does not follow that any of those emergent *communities of practice* necessarily carry universal meaning outside of the situations which have given rise to them. There will always be great learning to be had from the profiling of excellent practice, yet it will never be something that can be exported wholesale directly from situation to situation, as each situation is self-evidently different, and the individuals involved, their skills and experience, desires and interests, will vary accordingly. Hence the value of a dialogic approach to understanding the work; we make assumptions about new situations at our peril. Nothing is ever the same as we imagine it will be, and the most appropriate course of action or outcome can only be found by attending to the perspectives of those involved, rather than applying a predetermined formula or technique.

Being Human

There is no reason to presume that a dialogic way of evolving musical or artistic practices is a modern phenomenon. Given that the history of creative expression through Art and participation in the Arts goes back to our earliest ancestors, when we find our voice as artists - especially artists who support others' creative expression - we are joining a dialogue that reaches back millennia. John Fox' vision of the self-actualised artist as, 'facilitator and fixer, celebrant and stage manager, a visionary linking the past and the future, and a shamanic poet, the revelator of layers of perception and the holder of what used to be called spiritual energy' (Fox 2009) is helpful in understanding how particular practitioners, and practices, may come to prominence, especially as it carries within it the notion of artist-as-facilitator: 'equally of course this kind of artist would also acknowledge the artist in us all and offer testament to the innate creativity recurring in every generation and every community where the intuitive is given freedom' (Fox 2009)

It is the *creative tension* between these two positions - the realisation of one's own artistic identity and expression in relation to that of one's co-collaborators – that sits at the heart of a dialogic perspective on Participatory Arts. Freire tells us that in a dialogic encounter, 'there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know' (Freire 1970, 71) The act of creative expression might be taken as part of what he terms our 'ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human' (p.37), where finding the means of our creative expression is a way of fully realising ourselves as human beings; inhabiting the highest triangular segment of Maslow's hierarchical pyramid of needs: 'self-actualisation' (Maslow 1987). Critically, however, Freire argues that self-actualisation cannot be realised in isolation, but only through relationship with others, through dialogue: 'no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. The correct method lies in dialogue... Dialogue imposes itself as the way by which [people] achieve significance as human beings' (Freire 1970, 69) This is a perspective which resonates strongly with Lee Higgins's perspective on Levinas:

> ‘Our basic understanding of ourselves as human beings presupposes an ethical relation with other human beings. This is an enterprise that is synonymous with the questions that community musicians have asked, and continue to ask, from those who perpetuate the dominant culture’ (Higgins 2012, 12)

Viktor Frankl takes this idea even further:

> ‘Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualises himself. What is called self-actualisation is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualisation is possible only as a side effect of self-transcendence’ (Frankl 2004, 2)

As well as being dialogic, the practices which evolve when human beings are in relation with each other, supporting each other’s development as human beings on a journey of self-actualisation, are by their very nature situated and local, and often very personal. In musical terms, these human relationships manifest over time as what we might recognise as a body of work; project outcomes like songs, pieces of music, events, performances, groups, communities and ways of making music. In that sense, we all invented community music. The set of practices which I have evolved is particular to me, because of who I am, my experiences, skills and perspective, and the people I have worked with. Your set of practices will be particular to you, because of the experiences, skills, perspectives and people which have informed its development in your particular situation. Moreover, each occasion of Community Music will widen the scope of this ongoing dialogue, as new situations, participants, collaborators and learning reveal themselves. To paraphrase Margaret Atwood from The Handmaid’s Tale, ‘Situation is all’.[1]

Working freelance for Sage Gateshead’s Youth Music Action Zone (YMAZ) back in 2002, one of the inspired developments which prompted a good deal of unease at the time was the introduction of a Community Music Traineeship to build a workforce for the organisation of sufficient scale to meet its participatory ambitions. Those few of us working in our isolated pockets of quite specialised local practice were sceptical about the amount of work that would be available to a larger workforce. To our surprise - and ongoing pleasure at the rich opportunities for professional development it subsequently afforded - quite the opposite happened. Because a ‘practice’ is ‘a coherent, complex set of activities that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time, that is alive in the community who are its practitioners, and that remains alive only so long as they remain committed to sustaining – and creatively developing and extending – its internal goods and its proper standards of excellence (this commitment constituting them as a community),’ (Dunne 2005, 368) as more musicians became full members of our diverse *community of practice* and developed the skills to be able to work in community settings, the more our *community* grew, and the more work revealed

[1] Incidentally, there is an emergent view – the Knowledge Creation Metaphor - with Finnish scholars Paavola and Hakkarainen (Paavola and Hakkarainen 2005) leading the discourse, that such bodies of work, considered as ‘artifacts’, might represent a ‘trialogic’ perspective on the work. See (Karlsen et al. 2013) for a more detailed account. For the purposes of this article, I’m assuming that if we wish to consider the ‘artifacts’ arising from community music activity as separate entities, we can consider them as ‘super-addressee’ (Bakhtin 1981) positions within an emergent dialogic frame.

itself. I attribute this at least in part to the fact that no musician exists in a social vacuum – all of us exist in 'situations', and the amount of work grew as the practices of participation permeated those situations, a genuinely dialogical development.

Dialogics

Just as the principles of artistic and creative expression are ancient, so too are the principles of dialogue, at least as far back as Socrates and the idea of taking up an 'external' questioning position as a reflective technique for the advancement of knowledge and perspective. One interpretation of the goal of Socratic questioning is 'to allow [people] to generate their own solutions, to facilitate a process of self-discovery. From this perspective, [questioners] assume that they do not know the answer to their [subject's] problems and they attempt to discover the solution together' (Carey and Mullan 2004, 222) This acknowledgement of perspectives other than one's own is the pre-requisite for the initial opening, widening or deepening of what Rupert Wegerif terms 'dialogic space', or 'the gap between perspectives in a dialogue' (Wegerif 2012). A common experience of many of the experienced artist peers who work in participatory settings is that of 'reading the group', which is essentially taking an account of the different perspectives present to greater or lesser extents in any given group, and understanding what kind of intervention or action, using what kinds of skills and techniques, will best support the group to work towards whatever goal has been set for the group's development, either implicitly or explicitly, with (or sometimes without) their input. This professional capability is all about understanding the 'dialogic space' that exists within the bounds of any given group of people, and how the various individual skills and perspectives, as well as their differences, can be put to service for the collective benefit of the group.

Of course, implicit within this approach is a fundamental shift in the pedagogical role of the teacher away from the 'fount of all knowledge' and towards a more distributed way of 'knowing', where the knowledge, skills, ideas and input of everyone in the group is potentially equally as valid as that of the teacher:

> 'In dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They are jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (Freire 1970, 61)
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> 'Dialogic, as opposed to monologic, assumes that there is always more than one voice. More than this, dialogic assumes that meaning is never singular but always emerges in the play of different voices in dialogue together' (Wegerif 2012)

Being willing to sacrifice one's own position of perceived authority in the service of a learning environment where individuals are expected to have the resources and agency to come up with their own solutions takes some courage, but is ultimately necessary if 'dialogic space' is to be opened. Dialogic approaches to education may only really develop once a practitioner is more confident not just in their own subject knowledge, but also in their capacity to move beyond it to more humanistic ways of supporting learners' more rounded development as people. And knowing when to assert a more monologic perspective that will provoke and challenge co-participants to be more critical of their assumptions is an equally sensitive skill:

> ‘A more pragmatic reason for getting ontological about dialogic space is that I think it is useful pedagogically to be able to talk about ‘opening dialogic space’, through interrupting an activity with a reflective question, for example or ‘widening dialogic space’ through bringing in new voices or ‘deepening dialogic space’ through reflection on assumptions’ (Wegerif 2012)

It strikes me that one of the key characteristics of artists working most effectively in participatory settings is this capacity to allow the collective wisdom of the group to shape, at least in part, the creative direction of the work, or as Peter Renshaw puts it, ‘listening to people’s voices, absorbing different perspectives and understanding other people’s worlds’ (Renshaw 2013, 57) The sociologist Richard Sennett discusses this attitudinal approach as being consistent with a grammatical construct, the ‘subjunctive mood’, where ‘‘perhaps’ and ‘I would have thought’ are antidotes to paralysed positions’ and which,

> ‘counter the fetish of assertiveness by opening up instead an indeterminate mutual space, the space in which strangers dwell with one another. The social engine is oiled when people do not behave too emphatically. The dialogic conversation prospers through empathy, the sentiment of curiosity about who other people are in themselves’ (Sennett 2012)

In other literature, this attitude of accounting for the ‘other’ is referred to as ‘allocentric’ (Apter 2007) or ‘other-focused’, contrasting with a more ‘autocentric’ focus on the self. The benefits to the work are considerable, and makes for an exciting learning environment, for a number of key reasons. Firstly, the number of possible directions for the work increases:

> ‘The internal view that takes the other seriously is ‘dialogic’ because from this perspective meaning always assumes at least two perspectives at once and, as will become clear, the moment there are at least two perspectives then the gap between them opens up the possibility of an infinite number of possible new perspectives and new insights’ (Wegerif 2012)

Of equal importance is the impact that this approach has not just on the quality and diversity of the work, but also on the engagement of learners. In a learning setting where there is a multiplicity of possibilities, the skills of discrimination, discernment and criticality become of increasing value. Being able to compare and evaluate a number of options and discriminate between what commends them, invites a higher level of epistemological understanding, which Deanna Kuhn terms ‘evaluativist’:

> ‘At the most advanced, EVALUATIVST level of epistemological understanding, one recognizes that tolerance for multiple views need not imply the absence of discriminability among them. One view can be judged better than another, to the extent that view is supported in a framework of alternatives, evidence, and argument. Diversity of views can now be accepted, without foregoing evaluation’ (Kuhn 2013)

Rather than being expected to be told what to do, and either agree or disagree with it, learners who are part of a dialogic process become active co-creators of its outcomes. One of the reasons the approaches of community musicians and other artists may be experienced as dynamic and engaging is surely because of this invitation to be part of a more immersive engagement with learning. As Wegerif notes, writing about the Russian

literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin whose ideas have shaped modern dialogics, 'the authoritative voice remains outside of me, he writes, and orders me to do something in a way that forces me to accept or reject it without engaging with it, whereas the words of the persuasive voice enter into the realm of my own words and change them from within' (Wegerif 2012)

Indeed, while the politically-motivated pedagogy of Freire is clearly deeply influential on the value attached to 'dialogue', Bakhtin's theories are also critical:

> ''Dialogic' is a word coined by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin to name a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another' (Sennett 2012)

Another important dialogic concept which Bakhtin has given us is that of the 'super-addressee' position, 'how there is always a 'third party' in any dialogue between two people, the witness that you are addressing beyond the actual person you seem to be addressing' (Wegerif 2012) The importance of this idea cannot be overstated; it contains the notion that truth or meaning does not reside in either of the perspectives of the parties involved in a dialogue as such, but rather in the 'dialogic space' between those perspectives: 'Bakhtin was not referring to the truism that there can be many different but compatible perspectives on the same object but to the more radical idea that meaning takes place as an event only in the gap opened up by different perspectives in dialogue' (ibid). Wegerif takes this one step further, in the tradition of Levinas, suggesting that there are an 'infinite number of possible new perspectives and new insights' (ibid), which can be accessed as dialogic space is widened, a concept he likens to Levinas' 'notion of the Infinite Other' (ibid).

Dialogics might therefore be considered as another way of regarding the non-conceptual; liminality; the 'spaces in between'. It is as much about the 'gap' between perspectives, as it is about what is contained in any of those perspectives which make the 'gap' possible. Walter Benjamin's idea of the 'constellation' as, 'a figure constituted by a plethora of points, which together compose an intelligible, legible, though contingent and transient, pattern' (Gilloch 2002; Frankl 2004, 4) springs to mind. Or Adorno's 'negative dialectics' where the goal is to 'strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept' and 'thus reach the nonconceptual' (Adorno 1973, 15, 9) Paradoxically, it does not imply a resistance to conceptualisation; rather, it champions a form of conceptualisation where such resistance is vital, where 'multiplying difference while preserving resemblances' is more valuable than 'assimilating them through identification' (Crotty 1998, 133) This is similar again to Levinas' ideas about 'otherness':

> 'Rather than eliminating otherness, through an act of naming it or analysing it (in order to reduce it to a known quantity), Levinas seeks to preserve the otherness of the other and to respect the difference that distinguishes the other from the self. In the same way, community music seeks to celebrate difference both at the level of the individual and through our distinctive localities and contexts' (Higgins 2012, 12)

So far, so philosophical, but what does a dialogic approach to teaching and learning mean in practice?

Education through dialogue / Education for Dialogue

As Robin Alexander – a key voice in the approach to primary teaching known as 'Dialogic Teaching' (R. J. Alexander 2006; R. Alexander 2008) – notes, talk is a crucial element of a dialogic approach:

> 'Talk vitally mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, among children themselves, between teacher and learner, between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand' (R. Alexander 2008, 92)

In this sense, dialogic education might resemble familiar educational concepts like Vygotsky's notion of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), as the distance between a learner's 'actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and to the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving and adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky 1978, 86). Talk helps to encourage learners to climb a 'scaffold' of learning - actually talking about the learning helps learners make sense of it, rather than just 'passively' receiving it.

This might seem to be making a rather obvious point. However, Wegerif makes an important distinction in his writing that the term 'dialogic education' is used to refer to 'education ***for*** dialogue and not simply education ***through*** dialogue' or what he refers to as, 'the assumption held by many that dialogic pedagogy is about talk in small groups.' (Wegerif 2012) Rather, 'in dialogue there is a chain of questions and answers and each answer gives rise to another question. Dialogue is shared enquiry and shared thinking rather than simply, for example, just sharing feelings or sharing information' (ibid). In other words, there is a difference between using talk as a method for supporting learners to arrive at a pre-determined position of knowledge that the teacher has already identified, and the kind of 'real' dialogue where, 'it is not always possible to know what the outcome will be in advance' (ibid).

Being willing to enter *dialogic space*, and explore with learners the various other perspectives which reveal themselves by doing so, is quite a different pedagogical approach to the more conventional view of the teacher as 'the-one-who-teaches' (Freire 1970, 61) but it's a position that I believe is very familiar to those working in Participatory Arts outside of formal curricula. As musicians working in participatory settings, we often find ourselves in situations where we have to very quickly assess the interests and skill levels of diverse groups of learners in order to be able to design musical activities which will engage, stimulate and challenge them appropriately. If we get it wrong, we very quickly lose the group. If we get it right, the individuals in the group feel accounted, not just as learners, but as human beings, and this relational approach to learning often results in strong social bonds that go beyond any formal learning contract.

Perhaps the most interesting point in Wegerif's argument for a review of the kind of learning that goes on in schools is the impact that the internet has had not just on ***what*** we know, but on ***how*** we 'know' things in the first instance. 'The kind of education that is happening now on the Internet embodies a quite different educational logic from the logic that lies behind formal education systems' (Wegerif 2012) We may not be surprised that many learners increasingly seem to find the kind of 'banking' education which Freire was so critical of to be less than engaging, when they have the multi-sensory stimulation of the internet available to

them outside of formal learning environments, especially when they can directly contribute to the body of knowledge contained therein. As Wegerif notes, 'one distinctive new affordance of the Internet, in contrast to print and most other mass-media, is that it is intrinsically participatory. Like print, the Internet can be used in many ways but unlike print, it affords dialogic' (ibid), and this contrasts with the more prevailing 'monologic' contained in traditional pedagogies.

This does perhaps explain the increasing interest in how the lessons and approaches from Participatory Art can be transferred into the formal education system. Participatory Art projects often use Constructionist approaches to learning where, 'each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other' (Crotty 1998, 58) Our technologically driven culture almost expects us, if not demands us, to organise our world according to our particular individual interests and preferences, from how we listen to music, how we communicate with each other, our social networks, what we read, what we watch, how we consume. In most areas of our lives, we are beset with seemingly infinite choice[2]; we may even feel bombarded by it. Choice and preference has become the dominant watchword of our times, and it seems inevitable that how we learn should be similarly affected. Being involved in a dialogic creative learning process - and having some choice in the matter - is empowering, as it accounts for us as we are, and helps us to build up a positive identity of ourselves in a rapidly-changing world of ambiguity. As Peter Renshaw notes, 'creative collaborative processes can enable any person, young or old, to build up a strong sense of who they are by empowering them to believe in themselves and take responsibility for their own lives and for those of others' (Renshaw 2013, 4)

Musical Dialogue

There is another reason why dialogue may be a helpful – and maybe very familiar - concept for musicians, and this is because of the particular kind of transactions that go on within a musical exchange. As Daniel Barenboim explains,

> 'in a spoken dialogue between two human beings, one waits until the other has finished what [they have] to say before replying or commenting on it. In music, two voices are in dialogue simultaneously, each one expressing itself to the fullest while at the same time listening to the other' (Barenboim 2009, 20)

Schön's notion of 'reflection-in-action' emphasises the sometimes complex and reflexive adjustments which participants in such dialogue have to make to remain fully engaged within an activity. He uses the example of musicians in a 'live' setting, 'reflecting in action on the music they are collectively making and on their individual contributions to it, thinking what they are doing and, in the process, evolving their way of doing it' (Schön 1984, 56) This kind of 'simultaneous' dialogue is certainly not exclusive to music; collective improvisation in any form of exchange might involve a similar experience. Reflexivity and the ability to 'reflect-in-action' are valuable characteristics of any professional, but it is often music which is used as the most obvious example of the application of such traits.

Because 'brains are parallel processing machines, rather than serial processors' (Levitin 2008, 88) the notion of 'simultaneous' dialogue in music might provide an interesting perspective on the complexities of human consciousness more generally. For example,

[2] cf. Chris Anderson's The Long Tail (Anderson 2007)

consider Global Workspace (GW) Theory and its 'theatre' metaphor where consciousness 'resembles a bright spot on the stage of immediate memory, directed there by a spotlight of attention under executive guidance. Only the bright spot is conscious, while the rest of the theater is dark and unconscious'(Baars 2005, 2) It may be that in music-making one needs to bring more conscious awareness of the other voices into the 'spotlight' of consciousness, or at least to become more aware of them on the periphery of consciousness. Most people who have engaged in music-making with others will recognise what Barenboim describes; paying attention - to different degrees - to one's own expression, that of others and / or an overall impression of a group 'sound', sometimes all at the same time. In this sense, music and dialogue might both be understood as metaphors for colloquy, or 'speaking together' – the collective expression of multiple voices making harmonious or dissonantic sense in multiple ways simultaneously. In music, dialogic space – and how, in what form or even whether the tensions implicit in such a space are resolved – has a particular resonance, and is familiar territory to musicians.

Participatory Arts

The dialogue about Participatory Arts has a widening participation in itself. Recent initiatives like Paul Hamlyn Foundation's ArtWorks project (Artworks 2014a) have widened the dialogic space of individual artforms to include perspectives and voices from across a broad range of artforms and disciplines, and this is helping to deepen the same dialogic space by forcing us to question assumptions we have about what we understand about our own particular practice and perspectives. Projects that I have been fortunate to have been involved with, like the Peer Artist Learning project for ArtWorks NE, quickly revealed the breadth of practice involved when artists from different disciplines come together:

> 'If it is possible to consider the diversity of these practices and approaches as constituting some kind of 'community of practice' then it is an evolving, organic and emergent one, which changes with its constituent population, their artistic concerns and interests, and the participant communities they engage with through the work. The diversity of the many different and individual perspectives involved is always bound to be something that eludes absolute definition or rigid conceptualisation' (Camlin 2012b, 9)

The idea of reaching a consensus of opinion with the forty or so artists involved in the project was never an intention, but rather the project hoped to provide opportunities for the artists involved to engage in critical and reflective dialogue with artist peers with differing perspectives, thereby widening the dialogic space and revealing new perspectives on their practice, as well as gaining valuable insights into how artists learn the skills of facilitating participation. This resonates strongly with John Finney's notion of seeking opportunities, 'for making meaning and the engagement of critical thought which need some dissensus, not always consensus, different understandings, not always common understandings and some resistance to closure' (Finney 2013, 4)

The same dialogic principles informed the design of ArtWorks North East's recent short courses in participatory practice (Artworks 2013b) where the diversity of artistic and participatory practice opened up a very broad dialogue about Arts participation, discourses which arose in particular situations and disciplines but which resonate with Arts participation

in other fields. For example, although primarily a visual artist, Pablo Helguera's perspective on 'socially-engaged art' (SEA) and 'its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence' (Helguera 2011) chimes strongly with the ambit of the community musician. The lively exchanges about politics and aesthetics in the international visual arts community (Roche 2006; Kester 2006)are also pertinent, and Francois Matarasso's vision of, 'a community art practice that is rooted in humanist and democratic ideals; that questions assumptions, including its own; that is ethically engaged and politically aware' (Matarasso 2013, 12) speaks directly to the same sensibilities that motivated generations of artists, from Paulo Freire and John Fox onwards.

Dialogue resolves traditional dichotomies:

More than anything, a dialogic perspective on Arts practice in its fullest sense provides us with a fresh way of understanding the work. Because in dialogue 'meaning always assumes at least two perspectives held together in creative tension' (Wegerif 2012) as a concept it provides a neat way of bypassing some of the traditional arguments which surround the work; a dialogic approach enables us to resolve what might otherwise be perceived as dichotomous positions. We move away from a situation where ideas have to assert primacy; where someone is right and someone is wrong, where this is good and that isn't, to a situation where every perspective has potential value, and where quality is not absolute, but contingent and context-dependent. Situation is all.

Process and Product / Access and Excellence

I have heard colleagues in the sector talk about 'walking the tightrope' between 'process' and 'product' as if it were always a choice between one or the other. 'Access' and 'excellence' are similarly presented as mutually excluding terms – we are often expected to appeal to one or the other. A dialogic perspective does not see either of these as mutually exclusive binary opposites, but rather different positions within spectrums of practice which all need to be accounted, and which give us new ways of conceptualising the work. Although by no means absolute, an accessible artistic process will tend to have more perceived value if the resulting product bears artistic scrutiny, just as an 'excellent' artistic product may be considered more valuable if it is perceived to be accessible (Rusbridger 2013). Imagine instead pulling these various 'tightropes' of opposing forces taut as a means of creating a platform where the work can be raised; it is the creative tension between the various positions – or the dialogic space opened up by that 'creative tension over a gap of difference' (Wegerif 2012) – that helps to create the context for good work to happen.

It's easy to fall foul of this dichotomy – I assume (or maybe hope!) I'm not the only musician to have had a client disappointed that the final performance of a collaborative piece of work with year 4 students is not of a Concert Hall standard ('but you said the priority was to involve all 60 year 4s...'), or that all 60 of them were not involved in the post-production of the recordings prior to CD duplication ('but you said the priority was the musical quality of the CD...') The expectations that commissioning agents have of what can be achieved in a short, finite space of time are often very high, and it becomes increasingly important to recognise from the outset that achieving high results in terms of both 'process' and 'product' is very frequently expected. The limited resources of school budgets mean that what they may really be looking for is a single day's work where everyone in the school is involved in writing and recording a suite of musical material recorded to Concert Hall standard (despite the

acoustic of the school hall) that can be pressed onto CD and sold to raise funds. I exaggerate, of course, but the reality is that we *will* often be pulled in both directions, toward 'excellence' and 'access' simultaneously, even though they might require slightly different pedagogical approaches. Recognising when to emphasise which approach takes some practice.

Which is why the skills set of a community musician is particularly important. Musical skills are essential in shaping music for public consumption, while 'people' skills – especially empathy, sensitive listening, and an 'allocentric' (Apter 2007) attitude to participants – help to make sure the activity is accessible and inclusive. The skills of leadership then becomes about balancing the two, making sure as many people as possible are involved whilst continually refining and shaping the music for public performance. I notice it in my community choir all the time. Sing Owt! is an 'open access' adult choir with no audition, and the repertoire is mainly folk and pop, with an emphasis on local material. There's a strong social element to the group, but they also perform at some quite prestigious gigs, including on-stage with the professional house band at the 'community musical' at the local annual outdoor music festival, Solfest. When the group is re-forming in the autumn, with 'old-timers' (Lave and Wenger 1991) who have not sung together for a while joined by new members who do not know the material yet, there's much more emphasis on a welcoming 'process' to assist the group's re-formation, where individuals are seeking, 'to connect to and associate with other people, to want interaction and relationship'. (Benson 2009, 80) As we approach performance, there's much more emphasis in rehearsals on the detail of the music. However, even very close to performance, the tension between these two positions can be finely-balanced. Of course they want to sound good as a choir, so they're happy to spend more time on musical detail as we near performance, but being too directive and strict can lead to dissent as the 'fun' aspects of the musical experience take more of a back seat.

Ethical vs. technical

Which leads us neatly in to how a dialogic approach might also help to resolve the apparently dichotomous positions of how we might teach. Wayne Bowman writes, 'we may engage in musicking and teaching either technically or ethically; they may be undertaken either with technical or ethical intent... these represent two fundamentally different approaches, embodying two very different kinds of know-how' where an ethical approach conceives of 'music and music education as human interactions... special kinds of know-how that take their guidance from ethical considerations – from things like care and caring – rather than from compliance with 'objective' standards' (Bowman 2009, 115)

While of course we can imagine an *ethical* decision to employ a *technical* teaching approach with a given group or individual, the reality of practice is that the decision to approach teaching from either a technical or an ethical stance is largely situation-dependent. In a school hand drumming session, for example, we might want everyone to be involved and have fun, but we also know that the overall group sound will be better if the participants have learned some technique around hand positions and how to strike the skin to produce a good tone, so we make sure these technical aspects receive appropriate attention.

Striking the right balance between more directive 'teaching' and more delegated 'facilitation' is an important part of the teaching musician's approach to teaching and learning, not just in their longer term reflections on their practice, but often very much in the moment, as part of

their ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön 1984) whilst actually delivering activity. Having a plan (monologic), but deciding to abandon it because the participants want to take the music in a different direction to the one planned (dialogic) might require bravery on the part of the new leader, but is the ‘stock-in-trade’ of the experienced community musician. Indeed, planning activities with the expectation of negotiating and ultimately ceding ownership of the process to the learners often leads to the most engaging activities. And subsequently re-negotiating the process back to a performance focus can also often lead to the most exciting musical outcomes.

David Price’s recent work helpfully sets out a lexicon of approaches - albeit using ‘the three ugliest words in the English language’ (Price 2013) - which echoes the ‘creative tension’ between monologic and dialogic, where a traditional notion of ‘pedagogy’ is expanded to include more dialogic approaches:

> ‘In pedagogy, the learner is led to a conclusion determined by the teacher, informed by the teacher’s knowledge and beliefs – it could be termed ‘instructional learning’. In andragogy, though the destination may be decided by the tutor, the route involves greater learner involvement, acknowledging the importance of relevance, motivation and problem-solving. Although andragogy is a term open to many interpretations, let’s use it here to denote ‘self-directed learning. In heutagogy, there is not necessarily a defined destination, nor a prescribed route – it is ‘self-determined learning’ (Price 2013, 193)

We may ‘teach’ skills, just as we may ‘facilitate’ learning and participation, but that’s not to say that these represent binary opposite approaches to teaching and learning. From a dialogic perspective, teaching and facilitation are part of the same continuum - the same ‘creative tension’ - as the differences between pedagogy, andragogy and heutagogy which Price describes. The more the teacher’s perspective is foregrounded, the more pedagogic principles apply. The more the learner’s perspective is to the fore, the more heutagogic – or dialogic – principles of facilitation apply.

Crucially, the leap of faith for ‘musicians who think of themselves also as teachers’ (Swanwick 1999) is in allowing the *possibility* of heutagogy – or dialogic pedagogy – as a valid means of teaching and learning. In doing so, this is not to dismiss monologic approaches entirely. Thinking dialogically does not mean thinking *exclusively* dialogically:

> ‘The voice of monologic should not be simply rejected, but engaged in the dialogue at a higher level. In practice becoming more dialogic, both as an individual and as a society, can and should also mean becoming more monologic.’ (Wegerif 2012)

In a dialogic sense, facilitation – which after all is the art of ‘making things easier’ – might sit toward the heutagogy / dialogic end of the teaching-learning continuum, but it also allows for using more teacher-determined and teacher-led pedagogy / monologic when the situation warrants. However, it does not work the other way round. *Not* allowing for the possibility of a dialogic approach to teaching and learning means the palate of available approaches is restricted to a more prescribed, and teacher-determined pedagogy, thereby reducing the learner’s opportunities for self-determination in their learning.

A dialogic approach is both situated and situational – it occurs within a given situation and it responds to that situation. We may use more relational approaches to support reluctant or disengaged learners, and we may use more technical approaches to support the development of more sophisticated technical musical skills, but these decisions are generally made in response to our perceptions of learners' needs, or as Ken Hersey may put it, in terms of followers' 'readiness' and / or 'willingness' (Hersey 1997) Pedagogies which emphasise subject knowledge tend to be more monologic. Those which emphasise the learner tend to be more dialogic. Which is not to say that technical, monologic processes are bad. For someone who 'doesn't know what they don't know', It would be less useful to help them learn the guitar by engaging them in a dialogue about how they would like to learn it; it would be more useful to show them how to hold the instrument and play a few chords. However, when it comes to then applying the skills learned to a more creative endeavour (writing a song, for example) dialogic principles become more valuable.

Presentational vs. Participatory

Perhaps the most challenging set of dichotomies to resolve are those which exist between the two sorts of music which Thomas Turino identifies as *Presentational* and P*articipatory* (Turino 2008), as they represent quite different qualities of music-making:

> 'Situations of participatory music-making are not just informal or amateur, that is, lesser versions of the 'real music' made by the pros but that, in fact, they are something else - a different form of art and activity entirely - and that they should be conceptualised and valued as such' (Turino 2008, 25)

It is not only that there are, 'diverse notions of 'quality' that are more appropriate to different social and cultural settings' (Renshaw 2013, 6) but that also there are different qualities of music itself, with their own quality standards, which do not easily correspond. Because, '*Presentational Music* is a field involving one group of people (the artists) providing music for another (the audience) in which there is pronounced artist-audience separation within face-to-face situations' (Turino 2008, 51) it therefore follows that, 'the values and goals of presentational performance lead to different criteria for creating and judging good music' (p.52). It is fundamentally a different set of practices to that of *Participatory Music,* where, 'the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role' (p.26), performance here meaning playing an active participatory part in the music-making.

Even here, as with the other traditional dichotomies outlined, a dialogic approach can assist in resolving them. In western culture, unlike many of the cultures Turino outlines where *Participatory Music* is more prevalent, participation in music is often inspired by presentational performance, and the desire to engage in its quality standards. The urge to participate in music may well come from a social impetus for communal activity with other humans, but it may also come as a result of being inspired by presentational performers, and wanting to emulate their success. The recent rise in so-called 'reality' TV shows which emphasise and blend both *Participatory* and *Presentational* elements of music bears this out. Similarly, even the most *Presentational* kinds of music-making recognise the need to be accessible and relevant outside of what Daniel Barenboim refers to as an 'ivory-tower community of artists and audience' who may have, 'lost a great part of their connection between music and everything else' (Rusbridger 2013)

To reinforce the example above, ‘Sing Owt!’ often starts the new term as a ‘Participatory’ ensemble, where there is no audience, or imagined audience. We work in a circle, and often move around the room in sections, listening and responding to the various harmonies as they emerge. We’ll often dance as part of the singing, although only a few in the group would consider themselves ‘dancers’. When it comes to performance, lots of things change. We rehearse more in ‘stage’ formation, to an imagined audience, and spend more time on accuracy and intonation, as well as coordinating - and often simplifying - movements with an audience’s perspective in mind.

However, once the set is ‘on its feet’ and ready to be performed, there’s usually a pull back towards the idea of a *Participatory* ensemble once more. Audiences respond more positively, and the overall sound is better, when the choir members are clearly and visibly enjoying the performing experience – as if it were a *Participatory* performance - so there’s a lot of smiling, coordinated movement and eye contact between choir members, and a set will usually have some opportunities for audience participation. As well as more ‘formal’ stage performances, because we’re based in a very rural part of the UK, we also host more ‘informal’ musical events through the summer which have affectionately become known as ‘Off The Grid’ events involving a walk in the great outdoors, shared food, and a very informal performance, with the choir leading proceedings, but with everyone in attendance joining in where appropriate.

I hope these practical examples of some of the ways in which a dialogic perspective helps to illuminate my own practice, and sidestep some of what might otherwise be experienced as dichotomies, are useful, but I do not suggest them as a methodology. It is what works for me, and what works for you will be different, because we are different, and the groups we lead are different, and the situations we work in are different. From a dialogic perspective, there is no hard and fast ‘right’ way of doing it. There is only a way of doing it *in the here and now* that accounts as far as possible all of the various competing influences at any given point in time. It is not that any perspective at any point along any of the spectrums described above has primacy – rather, it is the creative tensions between all of the various perspectives the opening up of 'dialogic space', which becomes an exciting environment within which learning can occur.

Professional Development and Training

In turn, this makes a dialogic approach invaluable in terms of professional development and training. If the work itself is dialogic, then the best way to understand ‘dialogic space’ in order to facilitate it, is to enter it yourself. As Keith Swanwick says, ‘we can neither teach nor think insightfully about teaching what we do not ourselves understand’ (Swanwick 1999, x) Just as we cannot really learn the *values* of participating in Arts activity by reading about them, or simply being told what they are – we have to learn those values by experiencing them for ourselves – so too we cannot really facilitate a dialogic space unless we have an appreciation of what it is like to be in one. I would go so far as to say that we only learn the value of dialogic space once we start to see the benefits to our own practice of inhabiting one. However, once inhabited, it is the kind of space that can be opened - with peers with similar experience - to develop insights into ‘blocked’, unpromising or unfamiliar situations.

The opening up of dialogic space has become a key feature of my own pedagogical approach to professional development and training, although it is only with hindsight that I

realise my own journey as one of those, ‘musicians who think of themselves also as teachers’ (Swanwick 1999) has been significantly influenced by dialogic principles. Certainly at the start of my professional career, I would not have been able to articulate it in that way, and that may be because as a pedagogy it is only recently coming of age. It may also be that it takes time to develop the confidence to practice dialogically, as sacrificing one’s role and status as ‘the-one-who-teaches’ can be a vulnerable situation for any practitioner.

On my first morning in the staffroom of my first school as a new secondary teacher, I was introduced to my new teaching peers with the customary welcome of, ‘hello, and what do you teach?’ as a way of ‘getting to know you’. Everyone replied with the usual, ‘Hi, I’m *x,* I teach *y’* The response of the Drama teacher, a fantastic and inspirational woman called Lee Wyles, was, with a beaming smile, ‘I teach children.’ I have never forgotten the impact of her remark on me as a new teacher, as it so clearly emphasised the difference between approaching teaching as a means of imparting subject knowledge on the one hand; and becoming a partner in others’ self-actualisation on the other: ‘liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information’ (Freire 1970, 60)

In my brief (eight year) stint as a classroom secondary school teacher, my own approach to teaching and learning may have been often out of step with the more ‘technical-rational’ approaches of some colleagues in some other departments, but I am proud of some of the human connections with students that were made along the way, some of which sustain to this day. Of course, unlike more fixed technical pedagogical approaches, a dialogic approach to teaching might often also mean that you cannot rest on your laurels, and teach the same thing, the same way, year after year. To paraphrase the allegory, it is not possible for a teacher teaching dialogically to teach the same thing twice, because the learners are different. And so is the teacher.

As mentioned earlier, I was closely involved with Sage Gateshead’s community music traineeship, which used the principles of *Situated Learning* (Lave and Wenger 1991) and dialogic pedagogical methods to induct over 100 musicians from all backgrounds and disciplines over a ten-year period in to the practices of *Participatory Music* or CM. The success of that model led to REFLECT, Sage Gateshead’s national co-mentoring project for Creative Partnerships (Renshaw and Smith 2010; Renshaw and Smith 2008; Renshaw 2008) which experimented to considerable effect in opening up ‘dialogic space’ between practitioners from diverse communities of practice, and found that, ‘cross-sector reflective dialogue, that connects to its context and is grounded in evidence-based practice, is pivotal in strengthening the quality of partnership practice and collaborative creative work’ (Renshaw 2008, 6) Peter Renshaw’s further work with Barbican-Guildhall, ‘choreographing and sustaining a collective 'conversation' or reflective dialogue aimed at facilitating cultural change’ (Linden and Renshaw 2010, 27) continues to emphasise the value of a dialogic approach to organisational development, and ArtWorks North East’s Peer Artist Learning project mentioned earlier highlights the value of ‘the time and space for structured reflection in supporting [artists] to develop insights into themselves, their practice, the practices of others and the sector in general’ (Camlin 2012b, 14)

Maybe it’s still fairly early days for these kind of dialogic appraoches to teaching and learning, but I think that an appreciation of them – as evidenced by some of the above examples - could help to remove some of the ‘reluctance’ we’ve traditionally had about

conceptualising our practice, opening up new avenues and possibilities for articulating our practical truths in more academic terms, and provide more appealing routes to accreditation of those practices, and a broader 'professionalisation' of the sector. Being able to talk about our practices without risking the loss of their unique situatedness, or reducing them to more 'defined' and correspondingly exclusive and excluding concepts, means increasing the dialogic space between us. In the UK, these principles are already finding their way into postgraduate curricula, as evidenced in, for example, the recent ArtWorks NE postgraduate short courses (Artworks 2013b), Trinity-Laban's new postgraduate course, The Teaching Musician (Trinity-Laban 2014), and Barbican-Guildhall's ongoing developments (Gregory and Renshaw 2013), to name but three.

An understanding of dialogic education, and the practical application of it, is a journey, not a destination; an ongoing and continually emergent dialogue with learners, peers and with oneself. By definition, there are always new perspectives to account, and new things to learn. For me, this has most recently been in my current role at Sage Gateshead, as its Head Of Higher Education and Research, and in particular my involvement in the BA (Hons) Community Music, where musicians are supported to develop not just the skills, but the attitudes and values necessary to enjoy and sustain a career as a 'musician-who-also-teaches' Here, dialogic principles prove invaluable, not just as a way of preparing students with some of the pedagogical approaches to working with groups and / or individuals, but also as a vital way of making sense of their own practice and experience, and that of others (Camlin 2012a).

One of the greatest challenges on such a course – as it is in music education in general - is finding ways for students from very different musical 'worlds' (Finnegan 1989) or with very different musical 'accents' (Swanwick 1999) to share a musical language and collaborate meaningfully with one another. It requires students to acknowledge that their practice and perspective is just that – a perspective – and that there are many quite different, specific and situated ways of making music that need to be understood before one is fully able to be a rounded music educator in a musically plural culture. Although I agree with Swanwick that, 'we can neither teach nor think insightfully about teaching what we do not ourselves understand' (Swanwick 1999*,* x) I also believe we do not have to be expert musicians in ***every*** field of music in order to be an effective teacher of music. We do need our own areas of specialist knowledge and practice, and we do need to appreciate the specialised perspectives of others. Through dialogue, we can create exciting learning opportunities which explore the dialogic 'gap' between these perspectives. Just as in a workshop with participants, the use of dialogic space creates an appropriate forum for these differences to be shared, and for their correspondences and commonalities to be explored and played with.

Collaborative design - dialogic tools for learning together

It may be that a dialogic approach to education is becoming more prevalent as the internet provides not just more inventive ways to collaborate, but as mentioned earlier, that the *ways of knowing* implied by an online distributed model of knowledge encourage learners into more dialogic and 'Evaluativist' mindsets (Kuhn 2013). Rather than thinking of the internet as way of destroying knowledge and the criticality of its users, Wegerif argues that the rise of the internet signals a return to a much older set of epistemological values which pre-date print:

> ‘The concept of education afforded by print is a form of monologic which can be summarized as the transmission of true representations. The concept of education afforded by the Internet is a form of dialogic which can be summarized as participation in ongoing enquiry in an unbounded context.
>
> ‘Before mass print-based education, culture everywhere was largely oral and thinking was mostly understood in terms of dialogues’ (Wegerif 2012)

Because of this, it is no surprise that practical face-to-face dialogues in learning situations are increasingly supported by online dialogic tools. On the programme at Sage Gateshead, as well as the University’s *Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)* an ever-expanding range of internet-based learning tools support students to interrogate perspectives and refine their own. At the time of writing, Dropbox, Google Docs, Prezi, Socrative, Pebblepad and Zotero all feature as dialogic, collaborative tools which support student learning. Even the much-maligned Wikipedia might find a valuable role within academic study, according to Wegerif: ‘Using Wikipedia effectively requires a shift in attitude from being a passive consumer of other people’s version of the ‘truth’ to becoming an active participant in the process through which we construct useful but always fallible shared knowledge’ (Wegerif 2012) As new perspectives emerge, or ideas develop, everyone can be involved. No doubt in time, these platforms will be replaced by other, ever more sophisticated means of dialogic knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Dialogic pedagogy might be an educational idea whose time is ripe, as it responds to the way that our culture’s relationship with knowledge is fundamentally changing because of the affordances of the internet. And those of us working in Participatory Arts may have more to contribute to the debate than we imagine, as our situated *communities of practice*, and our approaches to learning, have grown and developed in dialogic ways, even though our reluctance to conceptualise our work as such may have hitherto left us without the language to properly articulate the value of our experiences. As colleagues in the formal music education sector begin to, ‘explore a way of thinking about pedagogy derived from dialogic theories of education and, in particular, consider the significance of creating 'dialogic space' as a dimension of a pedagogy for music’ (Finney 2013, 3) there is a valuable role that community musicians and other artists working in participatory settings can play in shaping this emergent discourse. While ‘the praxial turn affords a significant opportunity to reconceptualize music education as something explicitly committed to moral growth and social transformation, a move that might well permit us to do something meaningful about the ever more marginal status of music education in today's schools and today's society’ (Bowman 2005, 74) a *dialogic turn* might afford us the opportunity for even more voices to be heard and accounted.

I said at the outset that I was not setting out to provide any kind of definitive perspective, and nor am I. Dialogics is not *the* perspective, merely *a* perspective. As Pablo Helguera reminds us, ‘to impose a sort of methodology, or ‘school of thought’ onto the practice would only create an interpretation of art-making that the next artist will inevitably challenge, as part of the natural dynamics of art’ (Helguera 2011) Cynics might see the current quest for a ‘new paradigm’ to describe the work as casting around to replace one monology with another, to devise new sets of excluding language which ultimately only serve to reinforce our

divisions.[3] Do we really need to add *Dialogic Pedagogy* to that list? Without wishing to argue a special case for dialogics in the debate, the notion of dialogue provides us not just with another pedagogical *frame*, but also with a conceptual *frame* where everyone is free to make sense of their practice in a way that speaks to them. The wonderful paradox of dialogics is that if you do not see it as a valid or useful way of conceptualising the work, that's great! In rejecting it as a *frame* for regarding your practice, the dialogic space surrounding the work is widened, as it begs the question, 'if not dialogics, then what?' Choose something else. Or invent something. It raises the level of debate while maintaining empty, welcoming places around the table to be filled with as-yet-unheard perspectives. It also provides a valid way of conceptualising the work for those of us who would rather not have our practice categorised, or made subject to rigid taxonomies.

However we choose to think about our practice; let's think about it. However we choose to define it; let's define it. However we choose to talk about it; let's talk about it. In doing so, we will create a wider *dialogic space* where our debates and reflections will be richer, and the learning for all of us will be greater. And so, in the spirit of Aneurin Bevan: 'this is my truth, now tell me yours'

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[3] We already have:

- Action Learning; (Brockbank and McGill 2003; Brockbank and McGill 2003; Revans 1983; Revans 1972)
- Creative Learning; (Robinson and Aronica 2010; Robinson 2001; Robinson 1999; Sawyer 2008)
- Critical Pedagogy; (Abrahams 2013; Giroux 2011; McLaren and Kincheloe 2007)
- Expansive Learning; (Y. Engeström and Sannino; Yrjö Engeström 2001)
- Experiential Learning; (Boud, Cohen, and Walker 1993; Dewey 1997; Kolb 1983)
- Informal Learning; (Green 2008; Green 2002)
- Organisational Learning (Adizes 2004; Adizes 1992; Argyris 1999; Gratton 2000; Renshaw 2011; Senge 1990);
- Praxis; (Bowman 2005; D. J. Elliott 2009; D. J. Elliott 1995; Freire 1970)
- Reflective Learning; (Beaty 1997; Bolton 2010; Calderhead and Gates 1993; Hay 2007; Mezirow 1990; Renshaw 2008; Schön 1986; Schön 1984)
- Situated Learning; (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1999)
- Social Pedagogy (Belfiore and Bennett 2010; Helguera 2011; Jackson 2011)

and many others that I will have missed.

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