

Teacher research: Making a difference in music education. A one-day symposium to celebrate 25 years of the *British Journal of Music Education*

On 1st November 2008, more than 50 people gathered in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the BJME. The attendees represented the whole spectrum of the music education community including teachers, researchers, students and teacher-educators as well as BJME past editors. We were delighted to welcome colleagues not only from the UK but also from Ireland, Norway, Italy and the USA.

The purpose of the symposium was one of both celebration and enquiry. The focus of 'Teacher Research' was chosen because it seemed to us that it resonated well with one of the original aims of the journal which was 'to help us towards a better-informed and possibly more cohesive profession' (Paynter & Swanwick, 1984: 5), and the journal's original publicity strap, 'written by professionals for professionals'.

During the morning session four invited speakers explored different aspects of teacher research. Graeme Sullivan, Professor of Art Education at Columbia University, USA, spoke of how teachers and artists, through their practices, create new ways of understanding the world. He argued that the role of artists is not just to experience the arts 'through templates that others have created' but that 'interpretation and recreation is crucial'. Artists should not simply report – or follow a script – but should redefine knowledge.

John Finney, a teacher-educator from Cambridge University, suggested that following a period of de-professionalisation, the new standards agenda provides teachers with opportunities to become producers of research knowledge rather than simply its users. In a telling passage he compared the 'weak model' of teacher professionalism which simply 'follows best practice' to the empowered teacher who is an active evaluator of their own work through the process of 'sceptical enquiry'.

The third speaker was Pat Cochrane from CapeUK, an independent research and development organisation in the field of creativity and learning. Her presentation explored the experience of the Creative Action Research Centre Awards (CARA) in supporting partnerships between teachers and creative practitioners to undertake school-based action research. She identified a range of tensions that emerged from the programme, particularly around identifying distinctions between action research and evidence-based enquiry and professional knowledge and professional development. However, despite such tensions and irrespective of the intrinsic quality of the research, she argued that what the programme demonstrated was the benefits gained for teachers simply from the opportunity to reflect and think about their practice within a research context.

The final speaker of the morning session was Dr Tim Cain, a teacher-educator from the University of Southampton (UK). Tim argued for the distinctiveness of action research, particularly in the way in which it requires researchers to adopt a philosophical position which is different from that of other forms of research. He went on to explore the implications of this philosophical standpoint for the research process.

From these sessions a number of key themes emerged. These included the notion of 'identity'. Specifically, teachers and artists needing to define 'who they are' and act not just as autonomous artists but as advocates for their art and agents for change. Speakers also spoke of the challenge for artists and teachers inherent in operating within a context of multiple, and ever-changing identities. A second theme was the concept of 'knowledge': how it is defined, understood and created. More than one speaker made the point that new knowledge is created through the practice and processes of creating and creativity; that meanings are constructed not found. Through the 'doing' of art new insights can change what we know – the very nature of knowledge. As Graeme Sullivan put it 'The Arts cast a critical perspective over our historical and contemporary realities'. The third theme was the concept of 'creativity'. This was seen as a thread which should run through everything artists and teachers do, enabling them to make hitherto unseen connections and envisaging the world as it might be. The practice of artists working in music-learning environments, especially schools, and community contexts, within which teachers and learners become active makers of meaning and new pedagogic relationships and practices was also discussed.

During the afternoon three practising teachers gave presentations drawing on their own experiences and engagement in conceptual enquiry and research. Michael Tymoczko from Stanground College, Peterborough (UK), spoke about a collaborative research project undertaken with staff from Cambridge University. He explored how, through being given the opportunity to teach music to a class of year 8 pupils, disaffected learners in his school became motivated leaders. Fiona Sexton from Flegg High School in Great Yarmouth (UK) then spoke of her research into pupils' perceptions of learning in music and particularly the discrepancies between teachers and pupils' views of learning. Alex Baxter from Windsor Boys School and the University of Hertfordshire (UK), described an action research project which set out to discover the motivational effects on pupils when, using mobile phone technology, pupils were able to work with 'musical transactions made within the classroom' outside of the school environment. A common theme of all these presentations was the benefits to pupils' musical learning and motivation to be gained through giving them ownership of their own learning and empowering them as musicians and artists. Another implication for Teacher Research emerges from teachers' own constructions of their creative practice and how they rationalise and explain their own forms of pedagogic environment.

We were delighted to be joined for the final celebratory part of the day, by all the past editors of the journal and were particularly honoured by the presence of the founding editors Professors John Paynter and Keith Swanwick. Prior to proposing a toast to the future of the journal, John Paynter made a gracious and moving speech in which he reminisced on the founding of the journal and particularly the part played in its conception by, amongst others, Jo Glover and Brian Loane.

A photo gallery offering snapshots of this historic celebration and gathering of BJME's editors – featuring Keith Swanwick and John Paynter (founding Editors 1983–1998), William Salaman and Piers Spencer (Editors 1998–2002), and Gordon Cox and Stephanie Pitts (Editors 2003–2007) – along with the presenters and attendees at the Symposium, can be found on the BJME homepage: journals.cambridge.org/bjme.

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