



## Pupil perceptions of learning with artists: A new order of experience?

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### ABSTRACT

For many years schools have employed visiting artists to work with pupils on project-based activities. While there is no lack of evidence of the capacity of some artists to motivate pupils, there is little extant research that identifies how pupils describe their experience of learning with artists who champion contemporary arts practice. This article reports findings from a post hoc study in which pupils reflect on their experience of learning with a visiting composer and 3 professional musicians. The data for this qualitative interpretive case study were obtained from semi-structured interviews with a carefully chosen sample of 27 pupils who represented a range of ages (between 11 and 19). All had participated in a series of workshops which extended over an 18-month period in which visiting artists facilitated a series of 'creative days' at a range of off-site settings, including two residential weekends, where participating pupils were engaged in collaboratively creating and performing newly composed pieces. Three key themes emerged from the data: (i) developing meaningful learning relations with the pupils; (ii) engaging the emotional dimension of learning; and (iii) the significance of the physical contexts for learning. We then discuss the educational significance of pupils' perspectives on their experiences of learning with artists, the implications for educational partnerships that tune into their experiences, and the impact on creating a new order of experience for pupils as active participants in their learning.

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### 1. Introduction

For many schools, the commitment to educational partnerships between artists and schools stems from policy initiatives embedded within a context of ongoing educational reform. Since the publication of the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999), there has been a steady flow of government policies and advisory documents which refer to the importance of developing the creativity of children and young people in England. With this has come a burgeoning interest in the work of artists in schools. Set up under the auspices of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS, 2004) and the Arts Council, with funding of £150 million, the 2002 policy initiative *Creative Partnerships*.<sup>1</sup> *Creative Partnerships* (2005a, 2005b) has brought artists (or as often described, creative practitioners) into schools to enhance young people's learning through arts and cultural experiences. With over 330,000 young people and over 4500 creative practitioners<sup>2</sup> working in 36 areas of the country, learning with artists and from contemporary arts practice is increasingly becoming part of the development of young people as learners.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Creative Partnerships' initiative is the government's flagship creative learning programme designed to develop the skills of young people across England which, from 1 April 2009, will be delivered by a new national agency called Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE).

<sup>2</sup> 'Creative practitioners' is a term used interchangeably with 'creative professionals' and refers to artists, architects, scientists and multimedia developers (Sefton-Green, 2008). The terms recognise that the word 'artist' is often associated with arts specialists, whereas in the various Creative Partnership projects there are environmentalists, horticulturalists, media specialists and other partners who are not usually regarded as 'artistic' among the population at large.

More recently, a new national agency, Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE, 2009), has been created to fund and manage cultural and creative programmes for young people; it will invest a further £100 million between 2009 and 2011. One of the key policy messages has been the establishment of political imperatives for a 'a new balance in education' through 'relationships between schools and other agencies' (NACCCE, 1999, p. 10). In the light of these policy initiatives (as well as CCE, 2009; Creative Partnerships, 2007; NCSL, 2002; OFSTED, 2003; QCA, 2005), close partnerships are being forged between schools, creative professionals and cultural organisations. Key issues arising from these initiatives are: (a) How do pupils experience learning with artists? and (b) What does this tell us about the *pedagogic practices* which pupils themselves deem to enhance their learning? By pedagogic practices we mean the practices which artists (and teachers) employ to engage their pupils with learning; these practices are the result of any conscious activity of one person designed to enhance learning in another (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999). Contemporary arts practice<sup>3</sup> defines what artists do and why a specific practice is pursued through the context of particular ideological standpoints. The practices which artists employ to engage pupils may be more or less artist- or pupil-centered in that they may require more or less input from one participant or the other, with either the artist or the pupil or both working individually, in groups, or together.

## 2. Research on artists in schools

Much of the research in this field has focused on the partnerships established between teachers and artists (visiting or residential). Researchers have explored artist–teacher partnerships in a variety of education sectors such as in primary school contexts (Hall, Thomson, & Russell, 2007; Hall & Thomson, 2007), in secondary schools (CapeUK, 2005; Cochrane, Craft, & Dillon, 2007; Galton, 2008; Jeffery, 2005a), in further education (Cochrane, Jeffery, & Price, 2007; Jeffery, 2005a, 2005b), and in professional development programmes (Jenkins, Jeffery, & Walsh, 2008; Ledgard, 2006; Maddock, Sapsed, & Drummond, 2008). The research illuminates the wider aspects of partnership by describing the impact of the artists' pedagogic practices on teachers and they illustrate the more complex processes that promote inclusion in varying contexts. The findings have suggested that these partnerships are complex, and are characterized as both rewarding, and full of tensions and dilemmas such as partnerships which do not invite full collaboration or collaborative planning processes (Cochrane, 2008; Hall & Thomson, 2007; Jeffery, 2005b; Ledgard, 2006; Uptis, 2006). We know from Pringle's (2008) work, amongst others, that 'tensions arise between artist-led teaching and the expectations and procedures of certain types of school context' (p.49). However, where the learning of all participants is recognized, sufficient time is given for partners to explore the others' perspectives and approaches.

There is also information from the United States of America on the effects of arts-partnership activity on learning and the issues of time and institutional constraints that are faced by teachers, artists and artist–teachers (e.g. Uptis, 2006). We know that one of the most important vehicles for experiencing success in teacher–artist partnerships is the opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences, beliefs and practices and to build ongoing relationships in which 'partnerships' between artists and teachers are supported by professional development programmes (Chappell & Craft, 2009; Jeffery, 2005a, 2005b). Several studies (Colley, 2008; Galton, 2008) have used reflective tools to gather data – written responses, information conversations and interviews. These tools all require time and space to explore, to plan and to sustain collaborative practices. We know from international commentaries on artists working in educational settings and the complexities of the artists' roles, that scholar-artist–teachers are doing more to develop richer partnership-based pedagogies than they document (Harwood, 2007; Mans, 2007; Matsunabu, 2007). While researchers observe pedagogic practices used by creative practitioners (e.g. Chappell & Craft, 2009, 2005; Cochrane, Ledgard, Marcus, & Wilmot, 2008; Cochrane, 2008; Cremin, Burnard, & Craft, 2006; Pringle, 2008) in galleries, schools, dance and science laboratories (Craft, Twining, & Chappell, 2008; Taylor, 2006), we have yet to learn about pupils' perceptions of learning with artists.

There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that there are, not surprisingly, contrasts between the pedagogies of teachers and artists; and that there are conflicting views on the place of performance and the performativity agenda of some teachers in comparison to the competence agenda of some artists. However, much empirical work on the significant impact on learning of artist partnerships remains to be done (Galton, 2008). Some studies have shown how artists define themselves as creative practitioners in terms of the artistic expertise, knowledge and skills they possess (Galton, 2008) as well as the pedagogic practices they use and develop in their work in schools (Hall & Thomson, 2007; Hall et al., 2007; Jeffery, 2005a). However, it has been argued that the key issue is the extent to which learning improves as a result of artists' pedagogic practices and this is essential for establishing and sustaining effective specialist partnerships (Chappell & Craft, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2008). We believe that the views and experience of pupils, as recipients of the opportunities for learning afforded by the partnerships, must be represented in the debate. There is currently a distinct lack of evidence on which features of artists' approaches pupils themselves perceive as having a positive impact on their learning.

Existing research accounts of pupils' experience of learning with artists tend to focus on the creative products rather than on the qualities that pupils experience as conducive to learning. For example, Galton (2008) reports on discussions between artists, teachers and pupils, in newly formed partnerships, about pedagogic issues relating to learning or classroom management. Learner accounts of their experiences of learning are rarely talked about. Missing from the artist partnership

<sup>3</sup> Artists who champion contemporary arts practice as undertaken in schools emphasise the production of new practices (and knowledge-producing communities) as compared to school arts practice which tends to rely on the security of established traditions (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999).

picture, therefore, is the third partner; the pupils themselves, what pupils think, and their perceptions of the extent to which they gauge learning with artists as ‘creating a new order of experience’ (Greene, 1985), have not been investigated. This requires research which tunes into pupils’ experiences and views about the forms of teaching and learning that they find challenging and empowering.

### 3. Learning with artists: a new order of experience?

In our research we intended to focus on the emergent perspectives on learning with artists of the pupils themselves. We did not want to impose a particular view of learning, or champion the significance of any one learning theory, unless it was relevant to the pupils themselves. However, we were aware of an emergent body of literature that focused on *learning* with artists, as opposed to artist pedagogy, that provided possible starting points from which we could begin to explore the pupils’ perspectives. More recently, in the field of creativity research, evidence has begun to emerge on the catalytic impact that artists can have on pupil learning, and that artists who engage in contemporary arts practice inspire learning in particular ways (Addison & Burgess, 2006). The catalyst is composed of a variety of ingredients.

One important feature is the potential to create ‘adaptive educational environments’, a term used by Loi and Dillon (2006) to describe the development of creative spaces that foster creativity in ways that lead to change (p. 363). Research has shown that artists enable hidden or unconsidered assumptions about time, space, and the context of learning to be questioned and challenged (Galton, 2008). There is further evidence of the significance of establishing a broader ‘zone’ for learning than schools alone can provide by the use of real world cultural settings as contexts for learning which provide pupils with a sense of authenticity (Jeffery, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2008). Furthermore, the idea of the artist (or teacher) positioning themselves ‘alongside’ the learner is important (Armstrong, 1980; Chappell & Craft, 2009; Maddock, 2006). There is strong evidence of the positive impact of the facilitative stance adopted by artists in engaging students in the processes of creative learning (Loveless, 2008; Sefton-Green, 2008). Artists working in schools often identify themselves as ‘co-learners’, they resist describing their practice as ‘teaching’ (Pringle, 2008) and build the kind of relationships with pupils which encourage collaborative exercises. These exercises can involve ‘more sensory, immersive and physically rooted ways of working than are customary in classroom settings’ (Jeffery, 2005a, 2005b, p. 83). It is becoming clear that contemporary arts practices provide opportunities for activity and dialogue which uncover, share, and extend collaborative learning (Galton, 2008).

In contrast, pupils’ perspectives on the types of learning that emerge as significant when artists work alongside them is less well understood. What and how do the participating pupils think they learn? Does working with artists build a stronger understanding? What do pupils think they gain from the stimulation and challenge of being involved in an artist-led project?

From the field of music education, there are numerous studies that explore children’s meaning-making as composers (Burnard, 2006) and explore music-based partnerships between professional artists and teachers in primary school contexts (Rudeforth, 2008); between arts organisations, communities and schools (Colley, 2008; Stubbs, 2008), in higher education and university sectors (Cochrane, Jeffery, et al., 2007; Jeffery, 2005a, 2005b), and in professional development programmes (Jenkins et al., 2008; Ledgard, 2006). These often refer to the impact of the artists on pupils’ understanding of contemporary idioms, or to a fabulous musician who models music in action and to professional performances rather than the experience of learning. But from these studies we learn about what artists *do* when they are given the opportunity to learn from each others’ professional and musical experience. We do not find out what pupils learn. For example, we know collaborative composition, a concept placed at the heart of the training in the Royal College of Music’s diploma in Creative Leadership and between partner institutions, enables young people whose musical literacy ranges from novice to expert to learn effectively alongside young musicians in youth orchestras and rock bands. Role modeling, peer learning, communication, respecting diverse practices, expecting the unexpected and considering other perspectives are some of the influencing factors in which artists can work together to support children’s and young people’s participation in music. We know a lot about the pitfalls as well as the joys of working collaboratively with others in the exploration of partnership and collaboration in music education (Coll & Deane, 2008). We know artists who teach composing in partnership with schools offer participatory modes of working, and promote more collaborative, less constrained, modes of teaching than time and curriculum allows for teachers (Harwood, 2007).

Again, however, there appears to be no consensus about how pupils themselves perceive learning from these artists working in educational scenarios. Yet we know that understanding pupil perspectives on their own educational experience has a positive impact on learning. In a study which explores pupil participation and perspectives on school improvement, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) have shown that ‘pupils’ accounts of their experiences of being a learner in school can lead to changes that enable pupils to feel a stronger sense of commitment to the school and to the task of learning’ (p. 82). These researchers argue that the key things that affect pupils’ commitment to learning and their sense of identity as learners include principles of respect, fairness, support, security, autonomy, progress in learning and overall purpose in committing themselves to learning. This informs the present research in the need to further understand how pupils themselves realize the potential contribution to learning-related issues when artist work in educational settings.

The question remains: How do pupils perceive learning, and themselves as learners, when working with artists? Can pupils’ accounts of their experiences of learning alongside artists in schools lead to changes that enable pupils to feel a stronger sense of commitment to the task of learning?

#### 4. The research

This post hoc qualitative interpretive case study (Stake, 1995) was designed to explore pupils' perceptions of their experience of learning with artists based on retrospective accounts by the pupils themselves. Narratives were sought from a broad range of participants, aiming for an exploratory overview of the ways that learning was experienced by the pupils. There was a gap of a year between the end of the partnership project reported here and the beginning of the present research.

The research arose from a conference, hosted by the participating school, at which the researchers proposed a small scale study to assist the school in understanding the process of learning generated by the partnerships.

The intention was not to generalise beyond the particular context in which the study took place (Marton & Booth, 1998).

##### 4.1. *Introducing the school*

The research took place in a mixed comprehensive community college in the South East of the United Kingdom which caters for some 1100 pupils between the ages of 12 and 18 years. The school was placed in "special measures"<sup>4</sup> in 2002. A new and highly experienced head teacher was appointed at the end of the academic year 2001/2002. This also coincided with recognition of the school, by the government, as having specialist status<sup>5</sup> in the performing arts. A central strand in raising standards was the perceived need to develop genuine creative activity which engaged pupils and artists in purposeful and sustained learning. The context and conditions for composing in the school were in accordance with the school curriculum in music.<sup>6</sup> During the next 4 years there were numerous artist-led initiatives, one of which was a *Composers' Workshop Project* (CWP), led by a composer who developed a number of creative and interlocking projects.

##### 4.2. *The artist-led Composers' Workshop Project (CWP)*

Following a successful bid for a grant from the Specialist Schools Trust and Arts Council England: South East, and from Youth Music's "Music Maker", co-authored by the composer and the Head of Performing Arts, the CWP began in the school year 2005–2006, ran over 18 months, and comprised over 20 workshops. The project was conceived as involving 4 London-based artists (a composer and a contemporary music ensemble comprising 3 professional instrumentalists). The composer worked regularly with a London-based professional instrumental ensemble which included professional musicians whose work on the project was funded by the Arts Council (and Youth Music). They had previously completed several projects together, including newly commissioned works, and had some prior experience working on compositional projects with schools. The project did not seek to deliver the National Curriculum in music through composition. However, one of the aims of the school–artist partnership was to raise attainment in composing. This included the standard of pupils' composing.

The workshops were conceived as a series of 'creative days' at a range of off-site spaces or settings with the artists, including two residential weekends spent composing with the professional musicians (whose interactions were collaborative, playing and performing the newly composed pieces). Increasingly, the forms of individual support and tutoring developed by and between the composers, musicians and teachers to facilitate creative work, took on a high degree of personalisation. Individual pupils had choice, influence over and control of the learning.

The pupils were given the opportunity to interact directly with professional performers and composers who were specialists in contemporary music practices. Pupils were given the freedom and space to experiment with contemporary composing techniques. These sessions involved self-evaluation through video-recording of performances. The series of workshops extended over an 18-month period in which the artists (i.e. the composer and professional musicians) worked collaboratively on composing tasks with pupils. The aim was to compose and perform pieces inspired by and created within diverse settings. The project culminated with a public performance of newly completed pupil compositions created specifically for a cathedral concert presented by some 200 pupils in March 2006 to an audience of parents, family, friends and local school communities.

##### 4.3. *The principles that informed the artists' practice in the Composers' Workshop Project (CWP)*

A key element in the project's strategy to produce excellence in musical composition for acoustic instruments and voices, to be performed in real world contexts, was to use particular spaces as a stimulus and location for creativity. Inhabiting and

<sup>4</sup> Special Measures is the term applied following an Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) inspection when a school is deemed to be failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and those in charge are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the improvements needed in the school.

<sup>5</sup> Specialist status schools have a special focus on those subjects relating to their chosen specialism, but must also meet the National Curriculum requirements. There are currently 408 specialist Arts Colleges in England. Any maintained secondary school in England can apply for specialist status in one of ten specialisms: arts, business & enterprise, engineering, humanities, languages, mathematics & computing, music, science, sports and technology (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools/>).

<sup>6</sup> The school's curriculum in secondary music at this community college (years 7 to A Level) was driven by time pressures on coverage and assessment of the three key areas of composing, performing and appraising.

using a space creatively became an important element of the project. For example, a historic church and heritage sites were locations for the first stages of the project, which later expanded in scale to become a performance in a cathedral.

The project took place on whole days (e.g. inset days), in twilight sessions or weekend residential courses. The key stages and inputs of the process were:

- First experiences of composing (introducing sensitivity to sound, creating with sound, first notations and performing in space).
- Group improvisational workshops (building reference points, critical skills and glimpsing possibilities of spaces).
- Interactive workshops with professional musicians (introducing adult musical interaction and building communication skills through listening and performing).
- Individual tutorials (with attention to technical detail and craft).
- Performance coaching (with attention to performance standards).

The following aspects were key:

- Environment: using the environment as a starting point and source of material.
- External partners: involvement of a visiting professional.
- Experience/s: focusing on the quality of learning experience/s.
- Extension: using an ambitious plan to extend the pupils' compositional skills.
- Ecology: a central focus on building a peer-supported learning community.

The artists drew on their own experiences of contemporary arts practice, the above forms of engagement were considered by the artists to involve a generic approach to the learning process (as opposed to a subject specific approach) that connected with their understanding of their own arts practice. Significantly, these artists were not wedded to a particular model of creative practice but rather to the process of creative enquiry and to learners as active makers of meaning. In this way it was hoped that the CWP, although initiated in the context of learning in music, would lead the way in promoting an approach to creative learning across the curriculum.

One of the key principles that underpinned the artists' approach was the selection of spaces for workshops. The selection of spaces included sites of local significance, such as museums, historic buildings, galleries, outdoor landscapes, cathedral, churches and heritage sites. These sites were selected from within the local area, inspired by the local mythology and community, and were seen as a source and stimulus for ideas. Discussion about the selection of the site provided the starting point for workshop activity. For pupils to engage meaningfully in music composition, like artists, they needed to explore how sounds play out and ideas arise differently in different spaces. The opportunity to engage, draw inspiration from, and be liberated by the sound and space of a particular site, building or environment was a central component within these artists' practice. The artists provided opportunities for pupils to experience at first hand the spatial and temporal properties of a church, a cathedral or hillside, with the intention of exploring how such environments shape the creative process. Furthermore, the different spaces enabled pupils to engage in creative dialogues and develop their own unique creative responses. This was a central and necessary element of the workshops. Learnt assumptions about sound, its organisation, and the spatial qualities of spaces, were challenged. The idea was to provoke pupils into seeing and hearing things differently. Each workshop culminated in a performance of compositions inspired by and performed within each site.

The Composers' Workshop Project (CWP) was rooted in these assumptions about the context of composing, and, by extension, how artist-led facilitation of learning might occur in out-of-school and after-school workshop settings. The workshops were organized as a meeting place for the artists and pupils to participate in brainstorming, experimenting, exploring, improvising, composing, and performing original pieces together. A variety of ways of stimulating learning were used including written text, sound, static visual images, and kinesthetic expression, along with reflective writing and group discussions. The role of the teachers in these artist-led workshops was to adopt a facilitative stance, to support the artists in engaging pupils in the processes of learning, and enable pupils' reflection on their CWP work upon return to the conventional school scenario primarily through discussion, exchanging ideas and experiences.

#### 4.4. *Sampling in the CWP*

Over the period of three terms, the Head of Performing Arts recruited pupils for the CWP according to the following criteria:

- i. Pupils who would benefit from working with artists.
- ii. Pupils who had shown interest in taking music as an elective subject at the senior secondary level.
- iii. Pupils who had expressed a commitment to composing.

The composition project began with a cohort of 15 pupils from the community college. They were senior secondary pupils who had some experience of composing in classroom music electives. By the end of the year there were four groups of fifteen pupils – the original group and others from five feeder primary and secondary schools. These schools served two

**Table 1**  
Participants in the research project.

	Interviewees	N
Pupils <sup>a</sup>	Years 7–9 (age 11–14)	5
	Years 10–12 (age 14–16)	11
	A level (age 16+)	6
	Feeder secondary school: pupils	5
	Sub-total	27
Teachers and other adults	Head teacher	1
	Deputy head	1
	Head of performing arts	1
	Director of CPD	1
	Music teacher	1
	Domestic science teacher	1
	Geography teacher	1
	Feeder primary school: deputy head	1
	Feeder secondary school: music teacher	1
	Performing arts administrator	1
	Art technician	1
	Drama teaching assistant	1
	Artist who led this Composers Workshop Project <sup>b</sup>	1
	Sub-total	13
Total	40	

<sup>a</sup> In this article, only interview data with pupils are reported.

<sup>b</sup> Aspects of the Composers' Workshop Project are introduced in an earlier section.

disadvantaged housing estates in the South East of England and were invited to participate on the grounds that they were interested in composing and/or doing GCSE<sup>7</sup> music.

#### 4.5. Data collection and analysis

The research began in March 2007. Data were obtained from face to face interviews with pupils (along with teachers and the lead artist<sup>8</sup>). The interviews were conducted over a period of a week during which a total of 27 pupils were interviewed in one- and two-person interviews and focus group settings, each lasting between 30 and 60 min.

A purposeful sample of pupils was selected by the teachers who were involved with the programme. The sample represented a range of ages (between 11 and 19) and levels of attainment in composition. A summary of the sample is given in Table 1.

A flexible interview protocol was developed. There were also informal conversations with other support personnel in each school. This was considered a useful way of validating research findings through triangulation (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). This procedure yielded a comprehensive set of interview data along with documents such as photographs, CDs, concert programmes and pupils' written compositions.

During the interviews, the pupils were asked exploratory questions regarding the nature of the experience of learning with artists, the demands of the project work, the ways the artists worked, how they (the pupils) engaged with the project and what they felt they gained from these opportunities for learning. We asked questions about the ways in which they responded to working with professional artists, and to the learning situations and environments encountered during the composition project. During the interviews, participants had the opportunity to review a selection of photographs taken at different stages and phases of the project. These stimulated reflective recalls (Prosser, 1998).

The interviews were recorded electronically, given an anonymous code (P1–P27) and transcribed *verbatim*. A social constructivist perspective (Bryman, 2001) was applied to the qualitative data; this involved careful and repeated reading of each interview. Initially, three transcripts were independently scrutinized by each researcher. The procedures of qualitative content analysis were followed, using an open coding procedure where pupils' responses were placed into conceptual sub-categories using themes that emerged from the transcripts. Following a meeting to assess inter-coder reliability, codes were refined and clustered and definitions were developed (Robson, 2002). A process of data reduction followed. In coding and interpreting the data, care was taken not to add inferences to the narratives, since the aim was to capture the pupils' interpretations of their experience of learning with artists, not to impose the researchers'.

<sup>7</sup> The *General Certificate of Secondary Education* (GCSE) is the name of an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject – in this case, music – generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14–16 in secondary education in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> This article reports on the data collected from pupils. We also interviewed 13 adults from the organising school's leadership team. For details of the sample, see Table 1.

## 5. Findings

Three significant themes emerged from the data:

- (1) Learning relations.
- (2) The emotional dimension.
- (3) Contexts for learning.

While these core categories appear separated here, for the purpose of clarity, they are, however, interrelated as made clear in the close links between them in direct quotations from the interviews.

## 6. Learning relations

The artists developed learning relations with the pupils which inspired learning. Pupils frequently described the artists as ‘experts’ and ‘guides’ in describing their experiences of working *alongside* them. The presence of the artists seemed to enable pupils to trust in discussions about composing and to reconsider how they saw themselves and others as composers. Pupils saw the artists not as teachers but as collaborating with them as they would with their peers and other musicians. They seemed to enjoy the shared journey, and to find it easier to express personal and artistic ideas and to experiment as composers together.

*“They were experts...people that were involved in their professional worlds...they really worked alongside us individually...but they all connected to music and...they talked to us as composers, they didn’t talk to us like students or children, they actually talked to us like we were adults too...they shared things they’d been learning about themselves too...and guided us as they introduced and applied techniques for composing that were so new to us.” (P18)*

*“They learned along with us without you realizing it. And all the things that we did benefited that and we would sit down and we would talk about each of our pieces and theirs and we’d have a laugh with them. It was very easy going. But we learnt, and it was [a] fun way of learning...They didn’t treat us as if they were teachers and we were pupils...they were the experts and sometimes the learners who made us feel relaxed...like one of them...I felt good about the whole thing...working with artists was fun and inspirational...They each had an individual style and yet they guided us in discussions and created connections between their musical lives and ours. It was really interesting to hear them reflect about their work and memories of being our age.” (P14)*

The artists were seen by the pupils to encourage and facilitate collaboration. Through a scaffolded process of performing and composing together with the artists the pupils were encouraged to think of themselves and their peers as real composers. This process of scaffolding seemed to be based on a collaborative community approach which was favoured over the traditional skills-competency approach. The new approach allowed the pupils to draw on their existing skills and participate in the development of a composition which had their own personal learning embedded at its core. The artists appeared to recognize and adapt to pupils’ competence and confidence as performers so as to encourage, support and stimulate them.

*“They gave us tips and listened to us play...and we’d listen to them play and we’d listen to each other in ways we’d not done before...They treated us as completely equal to them in a creative and personal way. So they were just giving us advice because they were more experienced technically...Yet, they weren’t telling you what to do.” (P18)*

The pupils’ ‘authorship’ over material (a term coined by Fielding, 2001) was emphasised. Pupils felt that they were able to retain power and control of the learning. They were not forced to accept the artists’ ideas. Instead they were offered precise, but not prescriptive, feedback which enabled them to formulate and extend their own ideas. Having time to think and to extend (rather than change) initial ideas appeared to encourage pupil independence.

*“They guided us like somebody helping us and saying like if it sounded good or if it needed changes, slightly, so it would sound better. They weren’t telling you what to do. You were helped to understand...and they seemed to be learning along with you. You were not feeling like you’re being forced to do things...[there was] time to talk and negotiate the tasks which felt more like commissions.” (P10)*

Many pupils emphasised how the artists came to know them as individuals and as composers and not just as ‘pupils’. This knowing and being known mirrored the contemporary arts practice in which a dialogue occurs between composer and professional performers within a community. The artists composed music with pupils in the transactional space in the same way as they composed with other adults in their professional lives.

*“It was just sort of like being treated as equals really. They treated us all very seriously as real musicians ourselves...professionals who treated us like we were professionals and they wanted to know what was going on in your life...and learn about our interests...what we thought we were good at...and then they made you think for yourselves.” (P8)*

*“They made every idea we had come to life. So a simple idea would never be taken for granted or just saying ‘Yes, that’s nice’. They were able to make an idea sound special and make it live. They had a particular gift that way. They focused on our ideas and what was behind them and we got a lot from playing together with them.” (P10)*

Pupils thought that the artists shared their expertise, working and communicating together with them to generate something new and exciting, teaching them to trust their own thinking and that of others. This was done by using a collaborative communal approach to composing that recognized and built on their knowledge and understanding as composers. Working collaboratively provided the opportunity to test individual ideas against those of others.

## 7. The emotional dimension

Pupils characterised their experience of working with artists as deeply personal. The contemporary arts practice of the CWP engaged the pupils in ways which allowed space for or, moreover, actively encouraged them to draw on the emotional dimension of learning. Pupils were encouraged to take responsibility and make their own choices as composers. They expressed feelings of immersion and sharing, composing music which seemed to embody their own feeling and ideas. They were encouraged to reflect on their feelings, perceptions and opinions of themselves as composers. The artists seemed to regard the artistic proposals of the pupils with the same consideration given to the works of colleagues, sometimes to the extent of integrating a pupil’s attempt into their own work. This seemed to make the pupils feel valued and the growth of their confidence as composers was evident.

*Having been with so many different adults and seen how seriously they take us as musicians it’s given me a lot more confidence to just go out and try things with new people. (P6)*

*I found a lot more confidence and passion for music in myself because I used to be very sort of quiet and stay well back out of things. . .but now having seen that people will take me seriously. . .I’m much more up for learning anything. . .I mean just knowing that sometimes other people think, well they’ve got talents. And you can’t think what yours is. And then you find it. And I think I’ve definitely found mine. You could just walk with your head up high round that cathedral. (P15)*

Some pupils were anxious and expressed discomfort with the experience of ambiguity and the unknown which made them worry about not knowing what to expect and feel self-conscious about their own work. This intimidated some of the pupils.

*“I know where my piece was getting played actually changed on the day of the concert which really was quite scary. . .I found the project quite daunting because my first ever conducting experience was in a big cathedral with a band and I didn’t really know what I was doing. . .I personally didn’t know how to use space to my advantage when I first started and I didn’t have a high tolerance for chaos. I like things to be somewhat in control.” (P1)*

Some pupils were more anxious than others about how their pieces would be perceived and, for them, seeking approval became a frustrating part of the process of making music. Those who anticipated failure often became more guarded and defensive, and fearful when things did not work as they planned.

*“There were times when she did give me a few examples of what I could change but I wasn’t happy with them.” (P16)*

*“Well I found it quite weird because it was the first time with Music that we’d gone into groups. I was a bit light-headed to start with because I didn’t really have a clue what was happening. . . We just finished our piece and then she’d try to add more into it.”(P6)*

Some found it hard to compose without the high-tech, fast-paced and colourful forms and messages of electronic and digital media. Some negative reactions and impatience were expressed about the time-consuming processes of having to attend to the details and artistic risk generated by public performance.

*“Sometimes I found it hard and it become quite scary when I felt I didn’t have my normal ‘kit’ to work with. The build up to the final concert and completion of the final compositions for the cathedral took forever. . .But the closer and closer it got to go to the final performance of our compositions I got more and more stressed. It was quite scary. I got more and more worked up about things and it was hard to put this away. We’d be expected to spend our entire weekend doing composing and stuff.” (P27)*

Some pupils emphasised the feeling of being confused, conflicted or stymied in their work. Sometimes they came to a standstill because they were unable to move easily between the different phases of the creative process. Not all pupils valued the opportunity to display independence and autonomy in their work as composers.

Pupils emphasised how the artists allowed them to explore and reflect on the emotional troughs and peaks of composing in ways that recognized and built on their current competence as composers. They reflected on learning to manage intense feelings and channel energy into productive compositions that recognized the value and valuing of emotion. Building resilience, taking risks, and seeing mistakes and frustrations as positive were seen as fundamental to composing.

Pupils experienced a range of emotional responses to learning with artists. These responses are elements of an authentic experience and part of the process of successful learning, which is, by turns, challenging, exhilarating, frustrating, exciting,

puzzling and satisfying. Despite the stress, demands, expectations and immense effort invested in the preparations for the cathedral performance, the project was successful and this success was due to the fact that most of the pupils felt strongly that working with the artists enabled them to rise above what they would ordinarily be capable of achieving. In the process of learning to compose the artists were able to help pupils to open up new possibilities for learning and present them with the challenge of the unfamiliar.

## 8. Contexts for learning

The artists deliberately selected sites for the workshops at places which would inspire and support learning. Removing the structure of the school environment and allowing the pupils to play in, and compose for, out-of-school sites enhanced their participation and engagement with the creative process and gave authenticity to their experience of learning. It was clear that the experience of new out-of-school sites helped the pupils to see their own potential as composers. The sites inspired compositional ideas because of their acoustic potential. Pupils and artists worked together to create sonic tapestries, maximising the opportunities for playing and putting sounds together, having valuable discussions about acoustically inspired ideas and the resonant qualities of sound and sound spaces and developing ideas drawn from working in different spaces outside the time constraints and acoustic environment of the school.

The sites, located in churches and cathedrals, parks and other open spaces, offered opportunities for composing music for and in a space, exploring new ways of engaging physically and creatively with feedback from sounds generated without a preconceived idea of the outcome of the learning encounter. Journeys to and from these locations, fieldwork in forests and heritage buildings, placing the known into a context of the unknown (where the unknown is much stronger and much more fascinating and unidentifiable) was a new and stimulating opportunity for learning. It had a liberating effect (as did working in groups and producing pieces on a much larger spatial scale).

*“We experienced a fascination with sound. . . an experience of sound visions and events inspired by space. . . there was a stillness in some of the sites we found ourselves composing in. . . This was completely different from anything we’d experienced before. . . Because they were often very old churches and heritage buildings, just the way the sound works in various buildings was just completely different to anything I’ve ever heard or experienced before. Composing took on a different meaning. I started building pieces like a real composer. . . in these spaces was much more fascinating and inspiring.” (P3)*

*“You were taken to compose music together, collaboratively, and to play together in a church, for a church space and a historic space. . . it felt to me like I was learning how to make a new start, a new beginning in a completely new space. . . it was in an unfamiliar place. . . you’re not kind of used to the sound image of a place. . . it didn’t feel the same way as before. . . it was completely different from anything I’d ever heard or written. I could make harmonies and colours occur in new ways. . . I learned to compose idea pieces where sounds overlap continuously. One goes into another, or two on one at once, then another emerges from a previous one, and so on. I didn’t have to conceive a piece or imagine the performing group on stage. It was made and played in a space for a space. . . I created a number of pieces that did this - it was like weaving a sound tapestry”. (P2)*

*“When you go outside of school, which we don’t do often enough, there are no limitations of time and imagination. Composing becomes very holistic—you can break it apart into this or that dimension if you want, but I learned to think through my instrument in response to the spaces we were taken to. The lines and harmonies, the timbral sound, the tone, became terribly important to me. I didn’t have to try to hear or imagine a sound, I could connect directly with the sound event. I learned to compose in a connected way because of these musical encounters with space.”(P18)*

The pupils spoke of particularly strong links between the spaces in which they composed and the ways in which they worked. The process was open-ended and activities purposeful but an integral element of the experience was having to respond and adapt to the physical space they found themselves in.

*“It was very quiet, in a space that was very isolated and you had to just sit and listen within the church. Just listening and hearing the birds and the wind. . . It was weird at the beginning and then you kind of started to think about things differently. . . the kinds of reverberations, and kinds of echo, offered fantastic ideas and new techniques for composing.” (P20)*

Composing in (and for) physical spaces was described in terms of how they provided pupils with new inspirational ways of working. They were able to drink in the atmosphere and attune to the space, experimenting with sounds they could push, probe, poke, trash, hone and start over again.

*The spaces where we played, behind tapestries and stuff, under balconies, tops of archways, were inspirational. We were exploring and experimenting with possibilities all the time. I worked like a composer; that’s someone that feels emotion and feels the space they’re in, wherever it may be, and then who expresses all of that in music. I learned a lot from these opportunities.” (P17)*

*“We had to relearn how to be in a rehearsal. You know, professional rehearsals are completely different to being in a school rehearsal. . . And it became very different again when we were in a massive space like a cathedral with an audience. . . Like*

*the church that we first went to, when we first went to the church and learned how to listen to each others' pieces. . .and yeah the day that we spent at the other church composing and learning everything.”(P10)*

Pupils attempted to explain their use of these out-of-school sites as opportunities in which composing was the focus of learning and where the emphasis was on participatory spaces and practices which fuelled and inspired ideas for composing. Pupils were able to share aspects of their experiences of composing with artists and what they think made a difference to their commitment to learning and to their progress and achievement. Listening to what pupils had to say about learning with artists at these carefully selected sites provided the most striking opportunity for understanding what, for them, was important.

## 9. Discussion

The three significant themes lead directly to three points for discussion:

- (1) Learning relations.
- (2) The emotional dimension.
- (3) Contexts for learning.

First, we have strong evidence of the characteristics of relationships that pupils felt supported their learning. The data show that pupils felt the artists formed non-hierarchical, 'real world' relationships with them which they felt were different from the kinds of relationships they shared with their teachers. Although the artists were, of course, more technically experienced than the pupils – and pupils commented on this expertise – this did not create a hierarchical relationship with artists seen as holding competence to be transmitted to the pupils. Instead, the artists participated as co-learners alongside the pupils. They valued the pupils' competence and offered advice and guidance which pupils felt was different from the experience of being taught. The relationships were forged around a shared compositional project. Artist and pupil investigated and experimented together, each taking something different from the opportunity for learning. The relationships felt real and human to the pupils. They felt known as individuals and that they came to know the artists as people, rather than as teachers. The nature of the relationships encouraged the growth of *trust* between the artists and pupils, and trust is a fundamental ingredient of successful learning.

The nature of such collaborative and trusting relationships resonates with the principles for *Learning Without Limits* proposed by Hart, Dixon, Drummond, and McIntyre (2004) in their anti-determinist pedagogic model (derived from their empirical study of teachers who opposed ability-focused practices in all their forms): Everybody, Co-agency, and Trust. The authentic feeling of connection with the artists and belonging to the group of composers was strong. In spite of obvious differences in competence between the pupils and the artists, the differences were drawn on as a strength, a space and a point of growth, rather than engendering a feeling of helplessness (Dweck, 1999), to the extent that the pupils felt they had composed pieces as they wanted not as the composers wanted: they never questioned whether the compositions still belonged to them. This collaborative approach to learning enabled pupils to actively participate in learning alongside the artists as any other musician would. The artists brought something of themselves to the collaborative opportunity for learning. They drew on their own ordinary and everyday experiences as musicians and composers to instigate a particular type of learning process which resembled their own art practice. They engaged pupils primarily by prioritising the development of the pupils' own ideas, by using and embracing inspiration, drawing on the environment as a starting point and source of material which enabled them to articulate issues, reflect on and realise their ideas coherently as pieces of work. In this way, the process of learning was inextricably linked to ordinary art practice. Creative exploration and experimentation were embedded in an ideological commitment to tolerate failure. As such, the artists engaged, sustained and developed pupils' learning through integrating it as an ordinary extension of their own art practice thereby creating contexts for learning as opposed to the fostering of 'what works' or of a 'how to' approach.

Second, pupils' descriptions of their experiences indicate that the artists drew them into an emotional engagement with their learning. Emotion was used as a means of inhabiting opportunities for learning, of feeding inspiration, of shaping individual responses. They encouraged pupils to immerse themselves in the opportunities for learning, to connect to their feelings and senses, to engage in reflection and to draw on this in their compositions. Uncomfortable emotions too are a normal part of the experience of learning. Pupils participated in the CWP with a full spectrum of emotional responses to the process of learning. Pupils become aware of taking risks and seeing mistakes as positive, getting lost in ideas and being responsive and open, building resilience and using this experience to break through to new understanding. Learning also involves challenge and struggle, which can be manageable and productive if the purpose of the opportunity for learning is worth struggling for.

In essence, the artists helped pupils to acquire an 'expert' understanding of composing. The emotional dimension of learning (an important integral element of the artists' pedagogic practice) was also a significant factor in developing pupils' self and identity as composers. This is important in terms of tensions in learning, where openness and willingness to engage with the unfamiliar emerge as integral to new learning. Learning is likely to be deeper and longer lasting as a result of emotional engagement. This can be seen by the strength of the memory reported by pupils in this post hoc study. The development of identities (as composers) is particularly important; pupils shaped and were shaped by reflective conversations about learning.

Third, the pedagogical and educational significance of contexts for learning is particularly important. The characteristics of the spaces visited in the CWP offered pupils the potential for a deep connection and engagement with them; this inspired new, personal and increasingly sophisticated forms of expression. The opportunities for participating and composing in these contexts were multiplied: there were more and different possibilities for pupils to draw on to feed, inspire, shape and create their compositions. The 'real world' and the authentic nature of the spaces seemed to increase the pupils' sense of purpose. This was real composing, with real musicians, for a real purpose. Pupils talked about learning (and composing) and about themselves as learners (and as composers) in ways that legitimated the practice and transformational power of learning in out-of-school sites for young people.

Drawing on our understanding of the pupils' experiences of working with artists we have so far explored the forms of pedagogy and learning that pupils identified as empowering and challenging, and which they felt had a positive impact on their learning. We now turn to the possible implications of these findings. If learning is the outcome of opportunity and experience, and of giving voice to pupils' own awareness of their educational experience and the processes involved, then the range and nature of the opportunities for learning that pupils encounter is significant. We hope that by understanding what pupils valued in contemporary arts practice, and the processes and activities that pupils felt promoted their creativity (i.e. original invention) we can begin to explore and build on the possibilities for teachers' classroom practice and pupil engagement with learning in this context. It is evident that many of the features that pupils identified are within the gift of all teachers whatever their context or discipline.

There is much that teachers in all sectors and disciplines can do to bring real world learning into school. Teachers themselves can, and do, provide the trusting, collaborative, facilitative relationships that pupils found with the artists. Teachers can plan for the emotional dimension of learning. They can work to find or create conducive contexts for learning which maximise immersive, first hand sensory experience, and provide opportunities for learning where what is learnt, how it is learnt, and what counts as learning are inherently culturally and contextually specific. They can also actively seek opportunities for pupils to work alongside contemporary artists.

None-the-less, these are not easy aspirations in the current educational climate. Many teachers feel overwhelmed and constrained by the pace of curriculum coverage. There is immense pressure on teachers to be all knowing in ways which close down possible avenues of learning, to be able to determine outcomes before an opportunity to learn begins, and to predict attainment based on previous performance. Policy directives encourage teachers to know and determine the destination and impact of learning before the journey even begins. Pedagogies of transmission prevent teachers from bringing themselves into the learning. These are some of the characteristics of the current system that work against the kinds of relationships and opportunities to learn that the pupils valued most. Robust support for teachers is needed to enable both pupils and teachers to take risks and to work outside the known and the predictable in a policy environment which is characterised by a relentless focus on performativity and the attainment of pre-determined, predictable outcomes. Herein lies the paradox for teachers who describe a tension between their desire to enact values, develop relationships with their students, and enhance creativity on the one hand, while trying to raise standards and increase accountability in accordance with government-established benchmarks, on the other. A key challenge to teachers worldwide is to respond to the requirement to measure and test students, while fostering new pedagogies which model originality and imagination. Future research must explore and engage with the constraints and obstacles that teachers feel they face, and could offer valuable support and insight into ways of managing this divide.

From listening to the experiences of pupils we have also gained insight into the kinds of challenge that face teachers. The development of teacher–artist pedagogic partnerships are particularly important in broadening and deepening opportunities for learning. Artists have a huge potential contribution to make in the formal education system. We should recognise that they can offer an authentic relationship and add a real purpose to the experience of learning (whether this is about composition in music, design, story-writing or – extending the idea to other practitioners – science and engineering). Sternberg (1988) suggests that while creativity is often viewed as a solitary practice, collaborative risk taking can enhance and 'spur' creativity. Where partnerships between teachers, pupils and artists are fostered, for example, more scope for creative learning and less 'formulaic' approaches to teaching are found.

Further research is needed to examine contemporary arts practice and how this is experienced by diverse learners. The value for teachers of exploring the pedagogical significance of contemporary arts practice lends an especially important dimension to the issues of classroom practice and pupil engagement and the role of contexts in shaping, adapting, nurturing, refining and extending pupils' engagement. In areas such as composing in music and literacy, we know that diverse learning contexts and contemporary arts practice contribute in ways that we have not yet fully understood.

For arts practice to enhance learning across the curriculum further research is needed within teacher–artist pedagogic collaborations in schools. We hope that by understanding pupils' accounts of their experiences of being a learner with artists, that we have been able to identify some of what is needed in carving out a new order of experience:

1. Most fundamentally, school-level organisational policies and support committed to pupil perspectives, partnerships that tune into pupil experiences and implications for creating new learning experiences.
2. The degree of time and space enabled by the timetable for supporting meetings and the sustainability of dialogue, networking and talking about new learning experiences upon which new knowledge is constructed. Learning through art practice, in significant degree, depends upon pupils', teachers' and artists' ability to get in touch with each others' professional views, theories, perspectives and standpoints and sharing together the risk and conflict of art practice.

3. Building in adequate amounts of time for partnership reflection to support partnerships, collaborations and collegiality, is essential if artists, teachers and pupils are to search and research shared questions and encourage each other to question their own learning in relation to creating a new order of experience as active participants.

Listening to what pupils have to say about their experiences of issues related to learning with artists can enable professional dialogue between teachers and artists to flourish. Studying the collaborative learning and pedagogic opportunities for pupils and teachers working alongside artists has the potential to promote and develop a deeper understanding of the elements that contribute to both successful learning and more effective teaching.

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