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# Editorial Introduction

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Fostering creativity is currently a major educational and social priority, and this special issue considers creative activities in a range of forms of music education since these can be seen as valuable sites for studying and conceptualising creativity and therefore for trying to draw out more general pointers for developments in other domains and sites. The papers in this issue take a view of creativity in general, and of music making in particular, as fundamentally and necessarily social, and in many cases as an explicitly collaborative endeavour, believing that this view can bring new and important insights to our understanding of both the processes and outcomes of creative activities. This ‘social approach’ to understanding creativity and music, derived in part from socio-cultural theory and research, is one that has gained ground in the academic literature in recent years. It is also gaining ground in educational policy and practice development internationally since many educators are moving away from an approach focussing on developing individual skill levels and reproduction of a canon of work to one in which groups are encouraged to work together to create original pieces and new forms of expression. It is an approach which is currently opening up exciting new methods of study and

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theoretical insights for researchers from many traditions (see Miell & Littleton, 2004; Miell, MacDonald & Hargreaves, 2005).

This special issue builds on the growing interest in this area by offering a set of papers which apply the ideas inherent in the socio-cultural approach to the study of collaborative music making and music education. A central tenet is that if researchers are to understand and characterise collaborative creativity in the context of music education they need to examine the nature and influence of the interactions, relationships and cultures which constitute and sustain such activity. They also need to understand the use of cultural tools and technologies which mediate the activities.

A key principle informing the development of the special issue was the need to transcend disciplinary boundaries to make work on collaborative creativity undertaken in music education of relevance to researchers working in other domains. Creativity is not only relevant to those working in arts education, creativity is possible in all domains and is rigorous, rooted in discipline and balancing freedom with control (NACCCE, 1999, p.29). Thus in this issue we have encouraged authors to transcend disciplinary boundaries in explaining how the understandings they have gained through studying and theorising collective musical activities can inform our understandings both of creative group-work and of creativity in other contexts.

The special issue offers a distinctive and valuable contribution to this growing field of scholarship, presenting six research papers from researchers from the UK and the USA in the field of music education, followed by a commentary from Professor David Hargreaves of Roehampton University, UK whose expertise lies in music education and developmental psychology. The papers present both theoretical papers and reports of quantitative and qualitative research undertaken in a range of educational contexts, with children and adults involved in playing and/or composing music together. Young's paper opens the issue by reporting a study of three and four year old children collaborating together in 'socio-music' play, drawing on a micro-

analysis of the way the children construct their collaboration together, largely through non-verbal means. The following two papers (by Hewitt and Gall & Breeze) both examine different aspects of the mediating role of computers when used by children collaborating to create music in school contexts. The children were able to access musical composition despite some of them having little experience of musical instruments or compositional processes, and the papers explore how the tools offered by the different computer programs mediated their collaborative work. The next paper (Miell & Littleton) moves beyond the school context to examine the social and communicative processes operating within a group of young people as they rehearse together and work to develop a distinctive musical identity for their band. Still in this non-formal sphere, Sawyer's theoretical paper explores further the important role played by improvisatory techniques in education, drawing on examples from jazz and theatre. He emphasises the value of using both the apparently opposite features of structure and freedom in teaching through improvisation and developing collaborative practices. Burnard & Younker, in the final substantive contribution to the issue, explore the effectiveness of Engetrom's Activity Theory in examining children's collaborative music making in schools in the UK and USA. Differences between the talk and actions of the children when engaged on different musical tasks are examined as they relate to Activity Theory and the insights this analysis can offer for an understanding of collaborative creative working. The commentary provided by Professor Hargreaves examines the themes of each paper to draw out the extent to which the socio-cultural approach can be seen to be running throughout the contributions to this special issue. Taken as a whole, the volume presents a contemporary critique of existing literature, offering suggestions for how work on collaborative creativity needs to develop in future.

## References:

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