

Characterizing Communal Creativity in Instrumental Group Learning

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Situated broadly within the field of secondary (high) school education, and with a specific focus on the subject area (and extra-curricular educational setting) of instrumental music education, this essay provides evidence of the meaning of communal creativity as it arises in three interrelated practices: creative learning practice, creative teaching practice, and creative teacher leadership practice. This article reports on how learning is enhanced by experiences of communal creativity as illustrated in the case of a particular instrumental ensemble called *Percussion 1*. Findings support the specific nature of communal creativity, expressed in terms of embodiment, immersion, enhancement, and empowerment, and constituted socially (made manifest in a social context) through activity. Communal creativity has the potential to transform the experience of instrumental group learning with regard to the pedagogical values that aim to engage the whole community of learners.

Keywords: Instrumental group learning; Communal creativity; Activity theory; Communities of practice; Videographic analysis

Introduction

This project originated in Australia at the site of a national conference where I was introduced to the particular instrumental group featured in this essay: the members of the group were performing a concert followed by a workshop on the specifics of their practice. During this workshop, the teacher and students presented multiple viewpoints on how they learn to perform and prepare for performances. They opened up a public

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discourse and welcomed contributions that outlined alternatives to traditional modes of instrumental instruction. The present study developed from the many conversations that followed in person-to-person meetings during visits back to Australia and multiple emails. It was at the stage of data analysis that Tatjana Dragovic became involved as research assistant.

Because of the challenges and constraints of time, geographical space, and funding, the scope and design of the research featured and followed the qualitative paradigm in which participants were invited to actively keep rehearsal diaries and take videos of rehearsals and performances across a year. Although the study extends and advances the borders of our methods repository through the introduction of some arts-based visual research methods and videographic analysis, there was little scope for analysis as a collaborative process. Creating a space for, and building, this kind of internal dialogue into the research design—which is vital to narrative inquiry, autoethnography, and arts-based methods—is a dimension that is missing from this traditional subject-object relationship. Instead, we have used theory during analysis and engaged in cycles of analysis throughout the research process, locating ourselves as co-researchers and using the traditional process of triangulation of the data source, presentation, and time within the process.

Creative Pedagogies

Discussions of creativity often focus on how individuals can be more creative in their field of practice. Creativity in human systems can also, particularly in educational contexts, instigate actions and organize activities, which involve social, collaborative, and collective practices.

Important creativity research conducted by Peter Woods identified instances of teachers and learners struggling with the tensions that arise from the lack of shared understanding of the role of creativity in educational practice (*Critical Events in Teaching*). It is now recognized that the translation of education policy on creativity into classroom practice is neither straightforward nor unproblematic. The field positioning of creativity and accountability agendas in education causes tensions for teachers and learners, as does the rhetoric and authority invoked by these agendas.

What is highlighted by “creative pedagogies,” whether as a *concept* or as a practice emerging in educational discourse, is patchy, in part

because “creativity,” while site- and context-specific, does not stand in isolation from the wider social-cultural environment. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi reminds us that while creativity originates in the minds, actions, and interactions of individuals, it is fundamentally a sociocultural concept because it does not stand in the lack of shared understanding of its meaning (*Creativity*). Chris Bilton argues that creativity is embedded in a cultural context whereas Vlad-Petre Glăveanu introduces a new paradigm of creativity—“we-paradigm.” The we-paradigm emphasizes the role of community and its contribution to understanding creativity as culture and social context. According to Glăveanu, creativity involves connections between individual and environment, self and others, creator and culture. Min Han applies the we-paradigm to exploring creativity through understanding ways of thinking, activities, and values of the communal context in which creativity has been observed.

Examples of what might constitute creativity are provided and explored by Anna Craft, Theresa Cremin, and Pamela Burnard as “a capacity for significant imaginative achievement” at the interface of creativity and learning dimension (15; see also Jeffrey and Woods). One of the primary conditions of creativity is said to be the experience of dynamic atmospheres, involving climates of anticipation and expectation that can be observed only at the intersection where individuals, domains, and fields interact (Csikszentmihalyi “Implications”). Creativity can be seen as the development of understandings, skills, processes, appreciation, and thinking (Jeffrey), through the immersive state of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi *Creativity*), and as featuring utility, usefulness, and appropriateness (Runco and Jaeger). Anna Craft has explored “possibility thinking” as core to creative learning; she makes a conceptual differentiation between big “C” and little “c” creativities.

As noted by Craft, Cremin, and Burnard, there is a growing body of research on school-based projects exploring what constitutes creative learning practice in primary schools. One such study characterizes the teachers’ stance towards and the practice of progression in creative learning from infancy through primary (elementary) to high school sectors. Pamela Burnard reported that there was little evidence of conceptual understanding of creative learning made explicit in practice; neither was there any nurtured progression of creative learning in music (“Creativity, Performativity”). Little research has been conducted in school music classrooms or with extra-curricular instrumental music groups (Taylor and Littleton). There remains no agreement on how

creativity is (or should be) vested—as a construct—whether in the fields of education, culture, or industry. A seminal shift in thinking is urged by Anne Harris in identifying that creativity is currently “being co-opted and repackaged as ‘innovation’ in education discourses and linked to notions of productivity” and needs to move further “toward identifying an emerging new aesthetic, one that is [more] firmly interconnected with innovation and productivity” (180).

In the nearly 3,000 studies examined by Erik Moga, et al., the creativity tests used “might not actually detect the kind of creativity fostered by study in the arts” (102). Many of these standard tests have been criticized and debunked, for measuring intelligence-related factors rather than creativity, for being too easily affected by external circumstances, and for not being defined by an ideal but rather encompassing a range of theories, functions, characteristics, processes, products, and practices that are situated and contextual (Thomas and Chan).

Diverse musical creativities can also be displayed as instances of discrete *collaborative emergence* and *distributed creativity*, wherein the situation for music-making is formed moment-by-moment over time (Sawyer and DeZutter). Other types of creativities can be formed collectively or communally over time, through inter-relationships within a group, within a wider cultural, physical, and conceptual compass, or from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky). Multiple types of creativity can be related to the behavior of a type of learner, or to types of creative learning in school—referring, in different contexts, to distinctive modes of pedagogy. Teachers may be trained to see what each child has learned. Yet, despite being in a position to observe the child’s highly individualized mode of creative learning and thus provide the child with the necessary opportunities, teachers may not have developed explicit pedagogic or assessment practices, nor have the confidence to make the choices that should be made based on the elements of evidence, judgment, and outcomes in contemporary schooling (Sawyer).

The creativities from which music originates are evident in the interplay of myriad social and technological practices developed in the global sectors of education and the creative and cultural industries. This is evidenced in widespread community practices developed through “creative partnerships” between schools, arts communities, and inter-cultural sectors, which are changing the way teachers negotiate the necessary tensions of teaching in an age that must pay more attention to creativity. What constitutes creative teaching is often illustrated in

collaborative pedagogic practices between teachers and artists working in partnership in schools. Drawing on studies of jazz, theatre improvisation, and dance improvisation, R. Keith Sawyer addresses the question of what constitutes creative teaching as a paradox demonstrating “the need for teachers to balance structure and improvisation” (21), or for teaching to be more emergent, participatory, and improvisational.

Much has been written about the phenomena of and tensions between individual creativity (Sefton-Green and Bresler), collective creativity (Vygotsky), the attention now paid to group and collaborative creativity (Littleton and Mercer), and communal creativity (Lapidaki, de Groot, and Stagkos). Embedded in these formulations of diverse creativities are ways that humans make new meanings and in the process develop both themselves and the communality of meanings on which collective life depends. This lends itself to a conceptualization of communal creativity as a catch-all to express where individual and social actions and activities coalesce. Therefore, one aim of this essay is to explore what constitutes communal creativity and to observe the ways students and teachers mutually tune in to extra-curricular instrumental music group learning.

With these concerns in mind, our primary research questions were:

- What characterizes communal creativity in extra-curricular instrumental music group learning contexts?
- What are the elements that act as a framework to enable communal creativity to serve as a foundation for innovative instrumental group learning?
- How effective is the integrated use of Yrjö Engeström’s activity theory (AT) and Etienne Wenger’s notion of community of practice (CoP) for characterizing a depiction of communal creativity and the pedagogy that evolves from this practice?

What follows is a brief account of the overarching theoretical perspectives with which we have framed our research and how they work together to guide our analysis.

Theoretical Perspectives and Theory Use

Social practice theory (or CoP) sees knowledge, or knowing, along with creativity, or creating, as being situated in our ways of doing and being.

The key idea, and what is important for the present study, is the question of how instrumental music educators work in authoring new pedagogic practices and how these pedagogical values are expressed as/in instrumental group learning activity.

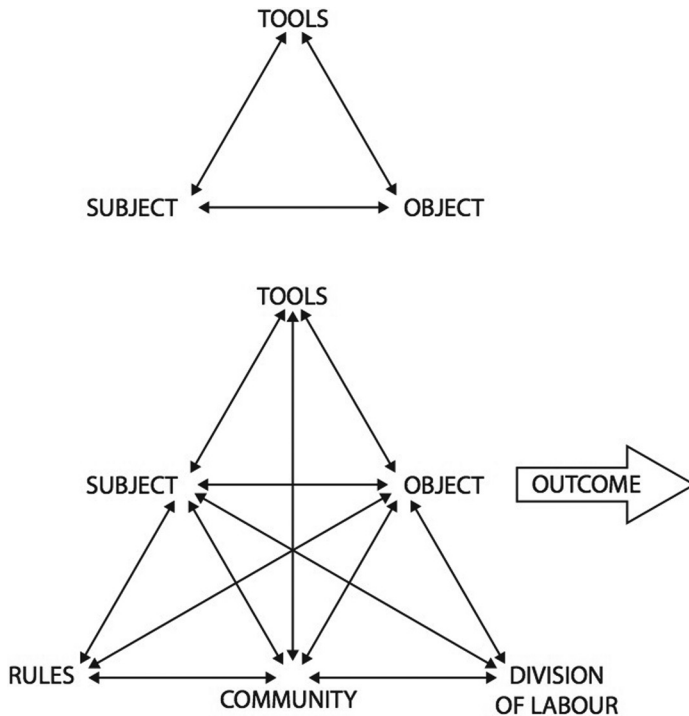


Figure 1. Based on Vygotsky’s model of a complex mediated act and Engeström’s complex model of an activity system.

The use of CoP offers a way of conceptualizing communal creativity, and AT a way of conceptualizing the activity of instrumental learning through participation. What we see as a key benefit in using CoP and AT as an operationalized analytical framework is the choice of different kinds of information, of more movement between internal experience and the outer senses of seeing and hearing, and the spaces that connect learning, teaching, and creative action.

Similarly, we see AT relating closely to *practice* largely in the way the word “activity” is used by Lave and Wenger: *activity* is what a community engages in as it *participates* in and potentially co-creates a practice. For

example, we might talk about the creativity of music teaching in a classroom, group, or one-to-one context, and focus on the “activity” of the teacher interacting with learners with a strong sense of pedagogical values that aim at mutual learning, the importance of social participation, and empowering students to make connections with each other. But, we have, as yet, little understanding of how and what the activity is that participants engage in as they participate in practice, and what happens in expressions of the people who form part of the community of learners.

An activity system includes the full complexity of the social situation and activity of people acting within it and is conditioned by the *rules* or norms that govern or constrain activity, the *communities* or social settings in which activity takes place, and how activity and responsibility are shared or divided amongst participants. *Tools* mediate how the learners and teachers (the *subjects*) experience and come to make sense of instrumental group learning (the *object*). The activity system is the framework that becomes a sub-structure for analysis of the pedagogic practice.

Methods

The research reported in this essay forms part of a larger study that explores the creative learning culture manifest in an Australian state secondary (high) school instrumental and choral music program and its learning community. The *Percussion 1* program (the focus of this article) included an intergenerational group of eight learners (five boys: John, Jeremy, Joel, Noah, and Alistair; and three girls: Zeta, Rebecca, and Barb), one teacher/head of the program (Sarah), and one former student/teacher (Shaun) who worked as an assistant to the head teacher. Informed consent was acquired from teachers, students and their parents, and school management. All involved were informed about the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Assurance of anonymity (changed names) and secure storage of data was also given.

A qualitative illuminative case study methodology was used to investigate ensemble interactions. The data was gathered by observations of 14 rehearsals, which were all video-recorded. Semi-structured interviews (13) with teachers and pupils were also carried out, and both the teachers and all the learners were asked to keep journals/reflective diaries (41) after each rehearsal. Conducting the interviews, which took place before and after the video and diary data collection, meant responses were gathered over 12 months. The journals/reflective diaries

did not have any predetermined form and were “free-flowing” accounts of teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of the group instrumental music learning activity. Sampling of the 14 rehearsals out of 40 was decided on by choosing a specific task within a specific period in the instrumental program *Percussion 1* (6-month-long preparations for the *Percussion 1* performance at the school’s Gala Concert).

We developed an inductive/deductive coding system that included six categories: tools, rules, division of labor, subject, object, and community. Visual research materials comprising of video recordings, video captures, and drawings from learners’ diaries were used extensively. As Peter Loizos argues, “the image, with or without accompanying sound recordings, offers restricted but powerful records of real worlds, real-time actions and events” (93). Thus, video captures were coded through videographic analysis for critical events, interactions, actions, and body movements.

Micro analysis of all 14 rehearsals was triangulated by the analysis of data from the interviews and reflective diaries. Inductive codes involved new categories, and these included *embodiment* (of the played music), *immersion* (intense engagement in playing, playfulness, and experimentation), language-based *enhancement* (through the use of metaphors, mental imagery, and storytelling) and *empowerment* (being a stance of belonging and being connected to others, and ownership of decision making).

What follows are the findings organized according to the AT elements, and discussion with comments on related topics of being and becoming a member of a CoP, of contributing to the development of communal creativity, and on the nature of the creative learning practice itself.

Findings and Discussion

We present the findings grouped into the AT-based units (tools, rules, division of labor, subject, object, and community), elaborated further through the lens of the CoP elements (engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise).

Embodiment: A Foundational Tool in Communal Creativity

The following vignettes and video captures offer snapshots or “stills” of the body–mind–heart and mental imagery, all of which are integrated as embodied musical participation and interaction between students and students, and students and teacher (see Table 1).

Table 1. Embodiment: Evidence from observations, interviews, and diaries.


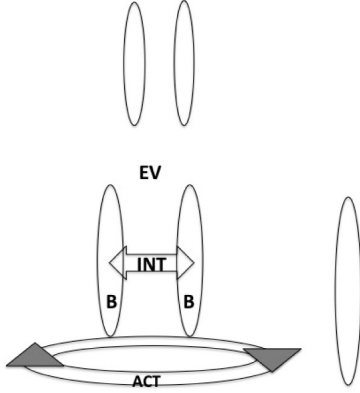

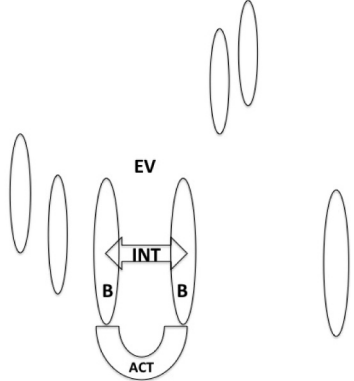
<p>Video capture 1: Shaun and Noah embodying the played music through dancing.</p>  <p>In Rehearsal 3/part 3 Shaun encourages the learners to continue after the break and reminds them about the part they will start with. The students start playing and Shaun invites Noah to start dancing in a circle with him in the middle of the room.</p>	<p>Videographic analysis of video capture 1</p>  <p>INT = Interaction EV = Event ACT = Action B = Body movement</p>
<p>Video capture 2: Rebecca embodying the played music through dancing.</p>  <p>Rebecca (on the left) starts moving and dancing to the rhythm of the played music while waiting for her part to start while Shaun and Noah slowly move back to their positions.</p>	<p>Videographic analysis of video capture 2</p>  <p>INT = Interaction EV = Event ACT = Action B = Body movement</p>
<p><i>(continued)</i></p>	


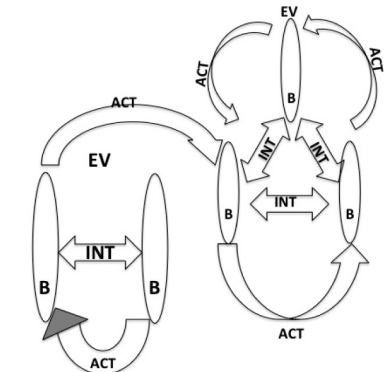
Table 1. (continued)			
<p>Video capture 3: Joel, Jeremy, and John embodying the played music through frog jumps.</p>  <p>The moment Rebecca starts waving her whole body (Video capture 2) Joel and Jeremy to her right start getting into frog position ready to jump/hop around. In a few seconds there are three boys (Joel, Jeremy, and John) jumping/hopping as frogs in the center of the room and around the instruments.</p>		<p>Videographic analysis of video capture 3</p>  <p>INT = Interaction ACT = Action EV = Event B = Body movement</p>	
<p>Embodiment: Evidence from observation</p>		<p>Embodiment: Evidence from interviews and diaries</p>	
Description	Findings	Description	Findings
<p><u>Rehearsal 2/ part 1</u></p> <p>Rebecca starts swirling in front of her instrument while others are playing; Jeremy (next to Rebecca) starts swinging from left to right while</p>	<p>- Progression from initial individual <i>engagement</i> through embodiment of the played music to mutual engagement of the whole ensemble</p> <p>- Embodiment of the played</p>	<p>Interview 1/Zeta . . . it's not just about playing well, you've got to play like emotionally and credibly and everything. Like you've got to know what the music is and you have like a story to it and everything. So not just being</p>	<p>Embodiment of the played music contributes to playing with energy; i.e., to playing emotionally and credibly (quality, expertise).</p>
<p>(continued)</p>			

Table 1. (continued)			
Embodiment: Evidence from observation		Embodiment: Evidence from interviews and diaries	
Description	Findings	Description	Findings
continuing to play.	music initiating engagement, <i>interaction</i> , and relations among members.	able to play well, you've got to play like with energy and with Embodiment of the played music contributes to playing with energy; i.e., to playing emotionally and credibly (quality, expertise) moving and everything . . .	
		Interview 2/ Jeremy ... <i>Yeah, exactly, it's a body instrument in a way. And if you don't have that energy flowing through your body and out into your instrument it's not going to sound full . . .</i>	Embodiment of the played music contributes to "full sounds" of instruments (quality).
		Interview 1/Zeta ... <i>Yeah, interaction is probably one of the main things because we all do like the movements together and everything . . .</i>	- Embodiment of the played music contributes to <i>interaction</i> among members of ensemble

As shown above, critical events, interactions, actions, and movements were coded in all video recordings and video captures. Patricia J. Sikes, Lynda Measor, and Peter Woods describe critical events as “highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development” (qtd. in Woods, “Critical Events in Education” 356). Woods understands critical events in relation to teaching and learning in four different ways, one of which defines them as events that “promote student learning in accelerated ways” (*Critical Events in Teaching* 77).

The above examples demonstrate not only the expansive/fast-spreading nature (from individual to group embodiment) of the use of embodiment of the played music, but also pupils’ full acceptance of embodiment as part of a shared repertoire of tools and strategies for instrumental music learning (Bowman and Powell). This might indicate an interactional and relational nature of the use of embodiment as pupils are interacting with and relating to each other in the process of generating movements, dances, and enactments of the played music. Thus the full engagement (on individual and group levels), participation (of all involved), and interactions/relations (among actors involved in the activity) are initiated by the use of the embodiment of the played music.

All other rehearsals were characterized by “moving,” participatory relationships with musical–social sounds and group experiences of music-making such as: (a) progression from initial individual engagement through embodiment of the played music to mutual engagement of the whole ensemble; (b) participants’ acceptance of embodiment as a part of a shared repertoire of tools for instrumental learning; and (c) the interactional and relational nature of the embodiment of the played music.

The interviews and reflective diaries provided triangulating data and a multilayered account of the importance of this theme of “engagement” in general and “embodiment” in particular, as well as learners’ reasoning behind the use of *embodiment* of the played music, thus demonstrating their awareness of its purpose. Learners rooted their kinesthetic/non-verbal approach to instrumental learning in their beliefs about strong interconnectedness between playing music/instruments on one hand, and human mental, emotional, and physical expressions on the other, as well as in their understanding of what quality/expert music playing should be like.

The videos, interviews, and diaries provided a rationale for engagement through the use of embodiment of the played music with its contributions to interactions in ensemble and to a high quality of music playing. The entwined relationship of music, musical performance, and how the body inscribes learning through gestures and movement, warrants us using the body and embodied encounters in instrumental learning at the center of our findings. Similarly, in a study of *taiko* drumming, Kimberly Powell reported on

the importance of muscle memory and of a quality of awareness that involves a sense of where one's body is in time and space and in relation to other ensemble members, in a message summarized in a statement made by the artistic director of the ensemble who said "you know it because you can feel it in your body." (qtd. in Bowman and Powell 1098; see also Powell)

Keeping in mind the above accounts based on micro analysis of rehearsals, interviews, and diaries, *Percussion 1* could be elaborated further as having features of communities of practice, defined by Wenger as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do better as they interact regularly. *Percussion 1* had regular rehearsals characterized by progressive (individual to group) engagement and participation aided by embodiment of the played music that contributed to interaction and good quality music playing. Although embodiment of the played music was consistently present in all rehearsals, it was not the only observed tool used for engagement and instrumental learning in *Percussion 1*. The following section introduces the use of *immersion through experimenting and improvisation/playfulness*.

Immersion: A Foundational Tool in Communal Creativity

Another learning strategy prominent in the rehearsals, particularly when the ensemble practiced more than one piece of music, was closely tied to the process of *immersion* through experimenting and improvisation/playfulness. Experimenting is understood as trying out new concepts or ways of doing things. Improvisation/playfulness is understood as being in an "as if space" and/or experimenting beyond the expected, prepared, or prescribed.

This learning strategy was characterized by the realm of the unknown, by the lack of any predetermined "final product," and by "going with the flow" and immersing in thoughts and ideas and creating

something new and different. The following vignette is from one of the rehearsals.

“Have you got it?” Sarah asks, but several learners look down and shake their heads as if not happy with how everything sounds. Sarah prepares to start again: “Let’s do it again!” She places her arms in front of her chest and then lets her arms fall along her body and says: “‘Spark’ is not the word. What is the word I want?” John shouts “twinkle” “Yes, thank you [laughter], one twinkle [laughter], it’s quite hard to say [laughter].” Everybody gets energized and chatty, Barb suggests they shorten it. They come up with a new word “twink,” which causes lots of laughter. Sarah tests it by saying “one twink [laughter].” Shaun, sitting in the background growls: “Aaarrggggh [laughter],” and says “twaaaank” with an exaggerated long vowel. (Rehearsal 5)

This account illustrates the processes of improvising and playfulness leading to immersion of all involved. The teacher encourages students’ improvisation/playfulness by asking for their ideas, and by accepting and incorporating any presented idea. The whole process of improvisation is characterized not only by its emergent and immersing character, but also by the joint effort of all involved.

Wenger emphasizes joint enterprise (along with mutual engagement and shared repertoire) as one of the three key features of communities of practice. Joint enterprise refers to the shared understanding of the members of what binds them to the domain and is brought about through the members’ interaction and main activity. The joint nature of *immersion* through improvisation/playfulness in *Percussion 1* might indicate that its main domain transcends music playing and encompasses improvisation and playfulness in instrumental music learning activity.

The interviews and diaries revealed that the pupils and teachers see the use of immersion through improvisation/playfulness as worthwhile, particularly due to it bringing excitement, fun, students’ agency, and connectedness into the instrumental music learning activity. Jeremy, in his first interview, said:

I’ve never pictured a rehearsal to be so exciting, so funny, people jumping around, people running around and we don’t know why we do that and what happens next and it is fun and exciting . . . sometimes we throw in random words, sounds, anything . . . and make something really new, unexpected, good. (Jeremy, Interview 1)

Jeremy clearly enjoyed the rehearsal he describes and emphasized what a positive learning experience it was for him. Sarah explores further what immersion through improvisation and playfulness brings to the whole ensemble:

I decided today to concentrate on finding out what the music would tell us—separating out parts, finding out how things fit together, getting everyone to listen to each other’s parts, exploring how surrendering to the music itself enables players to connect to each other’s parts. This principle of connectedness is central to ensemble playing. (Sarah, Diary 3)

What is key here is the readiness of students and teacher to do more than engage to co-create a CoP, which involves a kind of “surrendering to” and immersion in the practice; and a stance of belonging to and being connected with members of an instrumental group.

All the students and both the teachers reflected on the experience and meaning, for them, of immersion. The process of immersion was “something that you get at moments of playing together” when everyone seems “to link up in mind and feelings; where we feel connected through ideas that we’ve been experimenting and improvising on”; “sometimes it happens through exercises we’ve all made up together.” One student suggested that playing in *Percussion 1* was “feeling connected to everyone where everything else leaves your mind and you’re just playing in the moment, all together,” and “[you] all feel like you’re flying together outside of yourself, you don’t try and force it, it’s something that we work towards achieving in rehearsals and public performances.”

These accounts echo Glăveanu’s we-paradigm, which emphasizes that creativity involves connections between individual and environment, self and others, and a sense of belonging. By the strong presence of the we-paradigm in the language patterns of students and by co-creating novelties through improvisation/playfulness, creative practice of instrumental music learning activity in *Percussion 1* seems to be defined by the communal nature of creativity.

Enhancement: A Foundational Tool in Communal Creativity

Learners and teachers seemed to have embraced a learning strategy by which they are all encouraged to create new words, name sounds and emotions, co-create stories, describe images, and use metaphors freely.


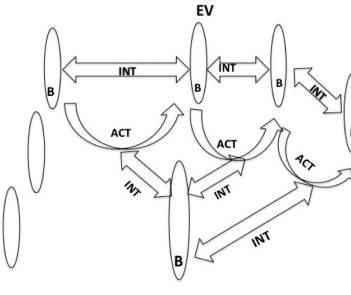
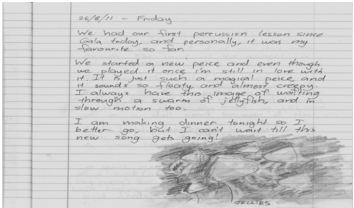
The analysis of the observational data, interviews, and reflective diaries offered the two most frequently employed language-enhancing elements: metaphors and storytelling. Metaphors are here used as figures of speech that use an image, story, or tangible object to represent a less tangible one or some intangible quality or idea. Storytelling is regarded as the interaction of words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination. Some of the previously presented accounts of rehearsals included the use of verbal and non-verbal metaphors, such as "spark" and "twinkle" (Rehearsal 5) and "jumping around as frogs" (Rehearsal 3). The following accounts from the diaries describe the abundant use of language-enhancing elements (metaphors and storytelling) in rehearsals (see Table 2).

Table 2. Enhancement: Evidence from diaries.

Segment	Description	Findings
Diary 5 and 6/Sarah (Teacher)	"Couldn't find the right word for the sparkling lights but eventually the image of Zeta's animation with her little bubbles disappearing off the screen, provided us with a better word to describe the feeling—"buoi." "Very productive session. Kids came up with names for some of the sections. The bass ti tika ti tika section is now called horsey. . . . This makes it much easier to talk about these sections and to muck around with the sequence."	The use of metaphors facilitates meaning-making and quality of music playing
Diary 1/Noah	"The 'story telling' or putting pictures to words technique seems to be the most effective way of enabling us to play at our best, as an ensemble."	The use of storytelling facilitates quality ensemble playing

The use of metaphors and imagery in one of the rehearsals had a particularly powerful impact on one of the learners (Zeta) who captured the "jellies" metaphor with a drawing in her diary. The drawing "mimics" jellyfish movements embodied by learners through actions and interactions during a critical event at one of the rehearsals (see Table 3).

Table 3. Enhancement: Evidence from observations and diaries.

<p>Video capture 4: Alistair and Noah enacting swimming movements</p> 	<p>Videographic analysis of video capture 4</p>  <p>INT = Interaction EV = Event ACT = Action B = Body movement</p>
<p>Drawing 1: Zeta's representation of the metaphor of "jellies" (jellyfish)</p> 	

As documented in Sarah’s reflective diary—“very productive session,” “Noah and Alistair started to play at the right volume”—the learning strategy, consisting of language-based elements such as metaphors and storytelling, contributed to the enhancement of the instrumental group learning by raising the quality of music playing and the level of understanding and meaning-making. Some learners reported that their processes of learning in general and memorizing in particular are strongly enhanced by the use of metaphors and storytelling. The language-based *enhancement* of learning enabled learners and teachers to engage actively and creatively in the instrumental program. The language-based *enhancement* became part of a shared repertoire of *Percussion 1* tools in the creative (instrumental) learning practice.

The process of introducing and generating metaphors and stories was initiated equally frequently by both teachers and all the learners, which might indicate that learners felt safe, free, and empowered to create/invent/make up images, stories, and sounds. The notion of

empowerment as a tool in creative (instrumental) learning is explored and elaborated in the next part.

Empowerment: A Foundational Tool in Communal Creativity

The fourth learning strategy that was evidenced in a majority of rehearsals and documented in the participants' reflective diaries encompassed positive, supportive statements that empowered all ensemble members to engage fully with, and contribute to, decision-making processes in *Percussion 1*. Supportive statements are defined here as "positive" statements that are likely to encourage or empower the "receiver." Decision making is seen as the act or process of deciding a course of action individually or with a group of people.

The account below illustrates the use of *empowerment through positive statements* as a tool in creative instrumental music learning activity.

Sarah and members of the ensemble explore how to play a slow piece of music. They have been playing it a few times already and they are still not happy. Sarah encourages them to explore more and asks Joel "What is the feeling when you come in? What do you reckon?" Others start talking all at the same time and Sarah listens, then Joel says "I rot," and Sarah immediately exclaims "Yes, you are right, that's it, you rot." Everybody seems pleased and ready to play the piece again. (Rehearsal 2/part 1)

The use of supportive statements ("Yes, you are right, that's it") invites pupils into the process of decision making. This is explained quite prominently in the teachers' diary entries; Sarah acknowledges the pupils' active engagement in the process of decision making in *Percussion 1* in the following way:

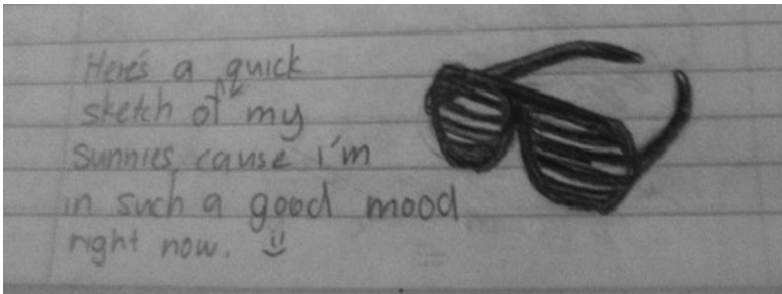
On a number of occasions I have given them the option not to tackle extremely difficult pieces, to go for something easier and less time consuming. For example with Toccata, I said right from the start that it would be a lot of work, that everyone would be pushed to get there. I gave them an option of not doing it, of doing something less challenging. I often involve them in these sorts of decisions. Same with rehearsals—do they want to have extra rehearsals? And they always want to do what it takes to achieve at a high level, despite the long hours, the repetition and the tiredness. (Sarah, Diary 8)

She explains further how feeling supported, belonging, and being able to engage with ideas, and to complement and embellish ideas and opinions is a communal practice that often leads to a burst of creative energy.

Lots of people having a say, but I find that the best results come from trying all kinds of ideas. Lots of the best ideas come from kids. Sometimes even if their idea doesn't work it will lead you somewhere better. Once kids feel confident that their ideas and opinions won't be dismissed, they're a great source of creative energy. (Sarah, Diary 9)

This is how Zeta felt after one of the “empowering” rehearsals (see Drawing 1).

Although we had a short, 2 hour percussion rehearsal this afternoon, I definitely left it in a very positive mood wearing my awesome blue shutter sunnies. . . . Here's a quick sketch of my sunnies cause I'm in such a good mood right now ☺ (Zeta, Diary 3)



Drawing 1. Zeta's visual representation of her positive mood after one of the empowering rehearsals.

Communal creativity was sometimes associated with a sense of detachment from day-to-day concerns. Feeling in a good mood often resulted from positive and empowering statements and by participation in decision-making. The combination of the use of supportive statements and of decision making ownership undoubtedly led to empowered members who participated in and engaged with the joint enterprise of music playing and music-making in the setting of the *Percussion 1* (instrumental) learning.

Rules, Division of Labor, Subject, Object, and Community

Rules, which are defined within the AT system as governing or placing constraints on actions within the activity, were evidenced in the study as *overt* and *covert*. Overt rules included having an “open-door” staffroom, the sharing of food, intergenerational ensemble participation, and involvement of former students and positive role models. Covert rules,

such as a whole group interactions and relationships in which creative activity takes place together rather than with specific individuals or one-to-one lessons, invoked processes (already elaborated in previous sections) of *connectedness* and *co-creation*.

In her diary, Sarah explains that her teaching changes according to the group she works with because it is a matter of co-creation.

My way of teaching a piece changes depending on the group I'm teaching because so much of the creation comes directly from that group of kids and that particular time. (Sarah, Diary 10)

Whereas the overt rules were known and accepted by the learners prior to their enrollment in the instrumental program, it was the covert ones evolving over time that seemed to have impacted most significantly on the communal nature of creative instrumental music learning activity in *Percussion 1*.

Division of labor in AT is defined as roles (musical and non-musical) that define the structure of activity and performance practices, wherein the division of activities among actors in the system is articulated. The division of labor observed in the rehearsals, performances, and further explored in the interviews proved to be non-hierarchical, horizontal, and democratic. Both the teachers and all the learners demonstrated two key features of the division of labor: dual roles (i.e., intertwined leader and follower) and shared responsibilities with elements of strong leadership.

Dual roles indicate the lack of classical, vertically linked relations and the presence of more democratic, horizontally linked relations. For example, observed communication flow during rehearsals did not indicate any power or vertically linked relation between teachers and learners as it encompassed many different directions simultaneously. There was no evidence of a traditional task or responsibility distribution—not even according to fixed instrument choice. During rehearsals, students tried out different instruments and were encouraged by teachers and other members to experiment with swapping instruments, and even to try playing ones they had never tried before. The switches of roles/instruments could be taken as indicators of an established full membership of all involved and shared responsibilities.

In spite of the prevalence of the dual roles and shared responsibilities in rehearsals, Sarah nevertheless demonstrates strong although democratic leadership. The students' awareness of her strong leadership

and their acceptance of it were documented in their interviews and reflective diaries.

We are achieving so much and Mrs. Sarah is going to keep pushing us because she knows we are capable of so much. (Barb, Diary 5)

Percussion 1 allowed mutual engagement of both teachers and pupils thus providing evidence of the collaborative and communal nature of creative instrumental music learning as well as providing evidence of a CoP, in which all members are actively involved. This particular ensemble (*Percussion 1*) was the subject in the activity of instrumental music learning steered by the common object, which was music, i.e., playing, learning, making, and performing, as well as meaning-making.

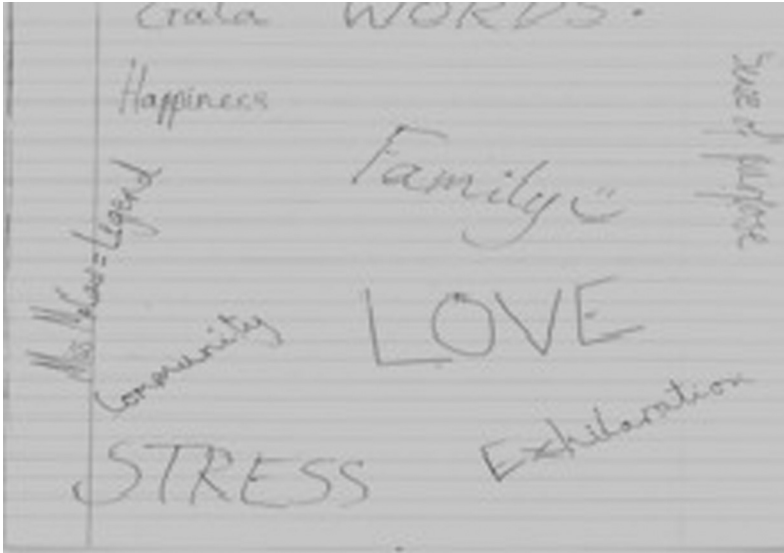
Data from the rehearsals, diaries, and interviews reveal that the students see their ensemble as something special and as such it plays a big role in their lives. The following account depicts the importance of *Percussion 1* for them.

So many things make this ensemble even more than special, we're like a family. . . . *Percussion 1* is just like totally different to the other ensembles. I mean obviously all the ensembles are special but Perc.1 just takes it to like a whole new level. We all have such a passion for music and an enthusiasm to reach further and to achieve great things which really brings us together. (Barb, Diary 6)

Percussion 1 has proved itself as a CoP with the joint enterprise/domain of music-making, creating, and performing, with individual and mutual engagement, and with a shared repertoire of overt and covert rules and tools like embodiment, immersion, enhancement, and empowerment. *Percussion 1* as a CoP is described by all involved as being of a special *transformative nature*. John's account illustrates the point:

This program has been the most amazing experience and journey and has taught me incredible things, one of these things is how to express myself not through words (as expected by our education system) but through music. Every rehearsal I discover new things about the members and also myself. (John, Diary 5)

The activity of instrumental learning was embedded in a community/social setting that reached beyond school boundaries as it included, besides teachers and learners, former students and an audience. However, what this community has been, for all involved, is simply summarized on the cover page of Joel's diary (see Drawing 2).



Drawing 2. Joel's diary cover page with key words describing *Percussion 1*.

The words are: Family ☺, Miss Sarah = Legend, Happiness, Stress, Love, Community, Exhilaration. A simple yet in-depth description of what *Percussion 1* as a community means to Joel. Clearly, *Percussion 1* sees itself as a CoP that is characterized by full participation, engagement, and a family-like atmosphere in which the pedagogic practice informs, shapes, and explains the act of learning.

Co-constructing Creative Pedagogical Practice through Communal Creativity

These findings suggest that learning was driven not only by intense experience and emotional responses to instrumental group playing, but also by co-authoring ways of teaching and learning. The findings suggest that communal creativity is a practice that is motivated, driven, embodied, immersed, empowered, and enhanced by the learners' and teachers' transformative experiences. Figure 2 summarizes the interconnectedness of creative leadership, learning, and teaching that enable communal creativity to flow in *Percussion 1*.

As noted in the introduction, the overarching purpose of this investigation was to explore the phenomenon of communal creativity. We found it manifest in the stance of *belonging* and *being connected to others*

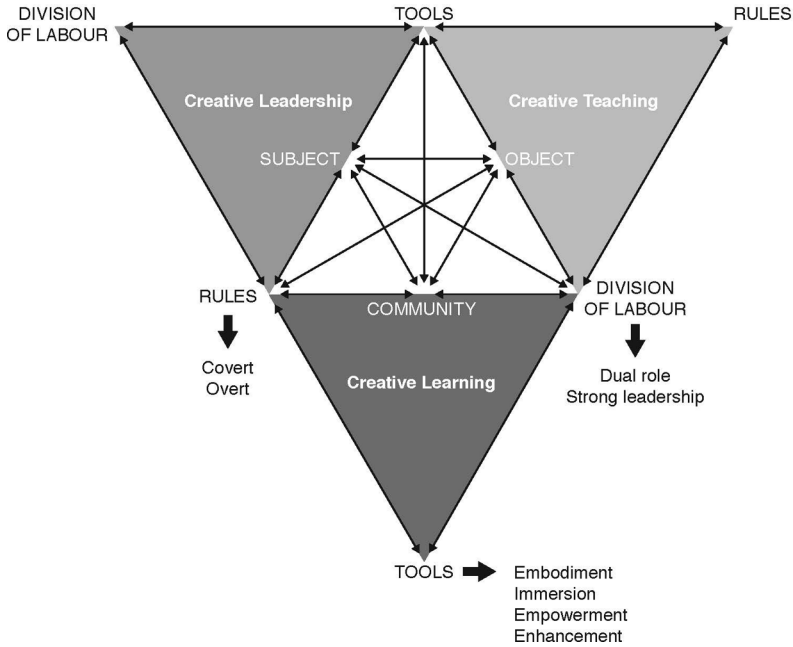


Figure 2. Elements of creative learning practice in instrumental group learning.

in the context of instrumental group learning. What follows are the implications for enabling forms of communal creativity that emerged from this study and that have the potential to fashion a new reality for emerging pedagogic practices in education.

Implications of Communal Creativity for Creative Pedagogies

If communal creativity is based on the use of leadership, teaching, and learning processes that are beneficial to the whole community, then this is the framework that becomes a substructure for creative pedagogies. The process involves (re-)positioning the learners as authoring their own learning, and recognizing the role of creative leadership, wherein choices and voices combine, sequence, and orient the (subject and object of) learning.

Research can only identify and describe different types of creativities and creative learning practices if its methods fit what we know

about the process of learning and the learning environments in which it occurs. While this study focused on, and was restricted to, one instrumental ensemble in an Australian secondary school setting, there may be implications for the methodological use of AT and CoP as a combined analytical tool in other settings. In sum, ways of enabling communal creativity in emerging pedagogic practices might include:

- Providing time to reflect critically on what engages learners in creative ways that model communal forms of creativity that find expression in instrumental group learning.
- Modeling the ways that invite communal creativity through multivocality, being connected to others, and looking anew at the use of play and playfulness as principles of instrumental group learning.
- Reducing performative pressures on learners' engagement by enabling peer-to-peer learning wherein students and teachers reflect, as a community, on playing and learning while feeling empowered and participate in an education exercise based on wholeness, wherein leadership is present and alive in all.
- Allowing for a high proportion of learner talk—much of it occurring between learners and teachers—that reflects on learner autonomy and agency and is characterized by a more improvised and less formulaic and fixed approach to pedagogic practice.

As artists, educators, learners, and researchers, we have a long way to go in shaping our pedagogic practices so that learners' ideas and interests are fully embraced and championed as being of central importance to the curricula we deliver. AT provides insight when teachers and learners attune to each other's ways of working and create new ways to engage in communal creativity. AT has the potential to offer a way of looking at the complex world of learning, making visible, accessible, and assessable ways of generating communal creativity. A sense of "belonging" in the instrumental music lesson, or in the mathematics or science lesson, can be developed by working with creative characteristics of practice that can enrich and enliven the learning environment. Pedagogic practices that are essentially creative in nature involve teachers and learners in partnerships in which the pedagogical values transform the experience of learning. As bell hooks claims: "only through such practice—can the act of helping become free from the

distortion in which the helper dominates the helped” (54). Communal creativity results in a strong sense of communal pedagogical responsibility: the ability to reflect and respond to mutual learning processes that are beneficial to the whole community of learners.

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