‘This Is My Truth, Now Tell Me Yours’: Emphasizing dialogue within Participatory Music

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

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

Accordingly, resistance to conceptualization has become a feature of the
community, not just in the field of community music (CM), but in Participatory
Art in general, a phenomenon noted by Owen Kelly as far back as 1983: ‘in
refusing to analyse our work, and place that analysis into a political context,
the community arts movement has placed itself in a position of absurd, and
unnecessary, weakness’ (1983: 3). Around 30 Years later, and still ‘many have
been resistant to defining [community music], believing that such a statement
would not do justice to the endeaveour of community music’ (Higgins 2012: 3).

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

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

(2012: 7)

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

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

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

I would like to suggest that a unifying feature of our work is the role that
dialogue – and a dialogic approach to pedagogy – has in understanding what
it is we do, and why we do it. In true dialogic tradition, I do not offer it as an
attempt to present any definitive perspective on these diverse practices, but
rather as simply a perspective. As the title of this article implies – with a nod
of thanks to the Manic Street Preachers whose album title they borrowed from
the words that Aneurin Bevan was wont to use in concluding his speeches –
dialogue allows for many different perspectives to have a voice in the conversa-
tion. In fact, the more voices there are ‘telling their truth’, the wider the dialogue
becomes, and the more inclusive. Rather than seeing this as a fall into faction-
alism and disagreement, the notion of dialogue – as a pedagogy as well as a
concept – has the potential not only to provide a helpful way of thinking about
some of the ways in which learning occurs in participatory settings, but which
also help to resolve and unify the inconsistencies manifest in the diversity of
our practices, and thereby enable everyone’s perspective to be accounted.

EVERY COMMUNITY MUSICIAN INVENTED CM

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

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

(Imrye 2013: 3)

The apparently contradictory positions implied in Ben’s observations might
well all be true, but should this inconsistency really trouble us? Moreover, is
there a way of reconciling these apparent inconsistencies?
Certainly before Participatory Music (Turino 2008) – or CM, or whatever name we choose to call it – found its way on to UK university syllabuses, the way that the practices evolved was in very situated and localized ways, often developing around key active musicians/artists with a social purpose. For every high-profile artist or organization developing participatory work in the public sphere, there are probably tens more building solid yet modest practices, ‘hidden’ from broader ‘communities of practice’ in the way that Ruth Finnegan describes in The Hidden Musicians (1989). I have heard Kathryn Deane from Sound Sense (2014) express a similarly ‘situated’ history of CM, citing the various ‘schools’ of practice as discreet methodologies arising around various communities of key practitioners.

Perhaps the reason why a conceptual consensus has continued to elude our sector is because historically, we have assumed that such a thing is desirable, while at the same time not being satisfied with any definition that does not closely resemble or fully account for our own individual perspective. Such a thing is not possible; each of us inhabits situations as unique as the individuals and practices that constitute them, and we cannot infer universalities from the situated understanding we have acquired. We work away developing and evolving communities of practice in our own situations, but tend to discount their situatedness, believing instead that our work reveals more universal truths. It’s little wonder, then, that there has been such resistance to conceptualization in the sector. Because, ‘we substitute concepts for what they represent, but no concept can ever capture the richness of the reality’ (Crotty 1998: 132), concepts tend to exclude more than they include. To fully understand the diverse and ever-changing nature of Participatory Arts and its sub-practices, we need to turn to more sophisticated ways of ‘framing’ it which both accounts for the diversity of those practices, without reducing them to mere concepts. The notion of dialogue provides such a conceptual ‘frame’.

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

**BEING HUMAN**

There is no reason to presume that a dialogic way of evolving musical or artistic practices is a modern phenomenon. Given that the history of creative expression through Art and participation in the Arts goes back to our earliest ancestors, when we find our voice as artists – especially artists who support others’ creative expression – we are joining a dialogue that reaches back millennia. John Fox’ vision of the self-actualized artist as, ‘facilitator and
This is my truth, now tell me yours' (2009) is helpful in understanding how particular practitioners, and practices, may come to prominence, especially as it carries within it the notion of artist-as-facilitator: ‘equally of course this kind of artist would also acknowledge the artist in us all and offer testament to the innate creativity recurring in every generation and every community where the intuitive is given freedom’ (Fox 2009).

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

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

(2012: 12)

Viktor Frankl takes this idea even further:

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

(2004: 2)

As well as being dialogic, the practices that evolve when human beings are in relation with each other, supporting each other’s development as human beings on a journey of self-actualization, are by their very nature situated and local, and often very personal. In musical terms, these human relationships manifest over time as what we might recognize as a body of work; project outcomes like songs, pieces of music, events, performances, groups, communities and ways of making music. In that sense we all invented CM. The set of practices that I have evolved is particular to me, because of who I am, my

fixer, celebrant and stage manager, a visionary linking the past and the future, and a shamanic poet, the revelator of layers of perception and the holder of what used to be called spiritual energy’ (2009) is helpful in understanding how particular practitioners, and practices, may come to prominence, especially as it carries within it the notion of artist-as-facilitator: ‘equally of course this kind of artist would also acknowledge the artist in us all and offer testament to the innate creativity recurring in every generation and every community where the intuitive is given freedom’ (Fox 2009).
Incidentally, there is an emergent view – the Knowledge Creation Metaphor – with Finnish scholars Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) leading the discourse, that such bodies of work, considered as ‘artefacts’, might represent a ‘trialogic’ perspective on the work. See Karlsen et al. (2013) for a more detailed account. For the purposes of this article, I’m assuming that if we wish to consider the ‘artefacts’ arising from CM activity as separate entities, we can consider them as ‘super-addressees’ (Bakhtin 1981) positions within an emergent dialogic frame.

Working freelance for Sage Gateshead’s Youth Music Action Zone (YMAZ) back in 2002, one of the inspired developments which prompted a good deal of unease at the time was the introduction of a CM traineeship to build a workforce for the organization of sufficient scale to meet its participatory ambitions. Those few of us working in our isolated pockets of quite specialized local practice were sceptical about the amount of work that would be available to a larger workforce. To our surprise – and ongoing pleasure at the rich opportunities for professional development it subsequently afforded – quite the opposite happened: the practices themselves grew. By a ‘practice’ I refer to Dunne’s definition:

a coherent, complex set of activities that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time, that is alive in the community who are its practitioners, and that remains alive only so long as they remain committed to sustaining – and creatively developing and extending – its internal goods and its proper standards of excellence (this commitment constituting them as a community).

(Dunne 2005: 368)

Therefore, as more musicians became full members of our diverse community of practice and developed the skills to be able to work in community settings, the more our community grew, and the more work revealed itself. I attribute this at least in part to the fact that no musician exists in a social vacuum – all of us exist in ‘situations’, and the amount of work grew as the practices of participation permeated those situations, a genuinely dialogical development.

Dialogics

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

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

In dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They are jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.

(Freire 1970: 61)

Dialogic, as opposed to monologic, assumes that there is always more than one voice. More than this, dialogic assumes that meaning is never singular but always emerges in the play of different voices in dialogue together.

(Wegerif 2012)

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

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

(Wegerif 2012)

It strikes me that one of the key characteristics of artists working most effectively in participatory settings is this capacity to allow the collective wisdom of the group to shape, at least in part, the creative direction of the work, or as Peter Renshaw puts it, ‘listening to people’s voices, absorbing different perspectives and understanding other people’s worlds’ (2013: 57) The sociologist Richard Sennett discusses this attitudinal approach as being consistent with a grammatical construct, the ‘subjunctive mood’, where “‘perhaps” and “I would have thought” are antidotes to paralysed positions’ and which,
counter the fetish of assertiveness by opening up instead an indeterminate mutual space, the space in which strangers dwell with one another. The social engine is oiled when people do not behave too emphatically. The dialogic conversation prospers through empathy, the sentiment of curiosity about who other people are in themselves.

(2012)

This attitude of accounting for the ‘other’ might also be considered as ‘allocentric’ (Apter 2007) or ‘other-focused’, contrasting with a more ‘autocentric’ focus on the self. The benefits to the work are considerable, and makes for an exciting learning environment, for a number of key reasons. First, the number of possible directions for the work increases:

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

(Wegerif 2012)

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

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

(2013, original emphasis)

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

the authoritative voice remains outside of me, he writes, and orders me to do something in a way that forces me to accept or reject it without engaging with it, whereas the words of the persuasive voice enter into the realm of my own words and change them from within.

(Wegerif 2012)

Indeed, while the politically motivated pedagogy of Freire is clearly deeply influential on the value attached to ‘dialogue’, Bakhtin’s theories are also critical:
‘Dialogic’ is a word coined by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin to name a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another.

(Sennett 2012)

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

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

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

(Higgins 2012: 12)

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

EDUCATION THROUGH DIALOGUE/EDUCATION FOR DIALOGUE

As Robin Alexander – a key voice in the approach to primary teaching known as ‘Dialogic Teaching’ (Alexander 2006, 2008) – notes, talk is a crucial element of a dialogic approach:
Talk vitally mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, among children themselves, between teacher and learner, between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand. (2008: 92)

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

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

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

Perhaps the most interesting point in Wegerif’s argument for a review of the kind of learning that goes on in schools is the impact that the Internet has had not just on what we know, but on how we ‘know’ things in the first instance. ‘The kind of education that is happening now on the Internet embodies a quite different educational logic from the logic that lies behind formal education systems’ (Wegerif 2012) We may not be surprised that many learners increasingly seem to find the kind of ‘banking’ education which Freire was so critical of to be less than engaging, when they have the multi-sensory stimulation of the Internet available to them outside of formal learning environments, especially when they can directly contribute to the body of knowledge contained therein. As Wegerif notes, ‘one distinctive new affordance of the Internet, in contrast to print and most other mass-media, is that it is
intrinsically participatory. Like print, the Internet can be used in many ways but unlike print, it affords dialogic’ (2012), and this contrasts with the more prevailing ‘monologic’ contained in traditional pedagogies.

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

MUSICAL DIALOGUE

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

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

(2009: 20)

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

Because ‘brains are parallel processing machines, rather than serial processors’ (Levitin 2008: 88) the notion of ‘simultaneous’ dialogue in music might provide an interesting perspective on the complexities of human consciousness more generally. For example, consider Global Workspace (GW)
Theory and its ‘theatre’ metaphor where consciousness ‘resembles a bright spot on the stage of immediate memory, directed there by a spotlight of attention under executive guidance. Only the bright spot is conscious, while the rest of the theater is dark and unconscious’ (Baars 2005: 2). It may be that in music-making one needs to bring more conscious awareness of the other voices into the ‘spotlight’ of consciousness, or at least to become more aware of them on the periphery of consciousness. Most people who have engaged in music-making with others will recognize what Barenboim describes; paying attention – to different degrees – to one’s own expression, that of others and/or an overall impression of a group ‘sound’, sometimes all at the same time. In this sense, music and dialogue might both be understood as metaphors for colloquy, or ‘speaking together’ – the collective expression of multiple voices making harmonious or dissonant sense in multiple ways simultaneously. In music, dialogic space – and how, in what form or even whether the tensions implicit in such a space are resolved – has a particular resonance, and is familiar territory to musicians.

PARTICIPATORY ARTS

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

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

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

The same dialogic principles informed the design of ArtWorks North East’s recent short courses in participatory practice (Artworks 2013) where the diversity of artistic and participatory practice opened up a very broad dialogue
about Arts participation, discourses which arose in particular situations and disciplines but which resonate with Arts participation in other fields. For example, although primarily a visual artist, Pablo Helguera’s perspective on ‘socially engaged art’ (SEA) and ‘its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence’ (2011) chimes strongly with the ambit of the community musician. The lively exchanges about politics and aesthetics in the international visual arts community (Roche 2006; Kester 2006) are also pertinent, and Francois Matarasso’s vision of, ‘a community art practice that is rooted in humanist and democratic ideals; that questions assumptions, including its own; that is ethically engaged and politically aware’ (2013: 12) speaks directly to the same sensibilities that motivated generations of artists, from Paulo Freire and John Fox onwards.

**DIALOGUE RESOLVES TRADITIONAL DICHOTOMIES**

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

**PROCESS AND PRODUCT/ACCESS AND EXCELLENCE**

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

It’s easy to fall foul of this dichotomy – I assume (or maybe hope!) I’m not the only musician to have had a client disappointed that the final performance of a collaborative piece of work with year four students is not of a Concert Hall standard (‘but you said the priority was to involve all 60 year 4s …’), or that all 60 of them were not involved in the post-production of the recordings prior to CD duplication (but you said the priority was the musical quality of the CD …) The expectations that commissioning agents have of what can be achieved in a short, finite space of time are often very high, and it becomes increasingly important to recognize from the outset that achieving high results in terms of
both ‘process’ and ‘product’ is very frequently expected. The limited resources of school budgets mean that what they may really be looking for is a single day’s work where everyone in the school is involved in writing and recording a suite of musical material recorded to Concert Hall standard (despite the acoustic of the school hall) that can be pressed onto CD and sold to raise funds. I exaggerate, of course, but the reality is that we will often be pulled in both directions, towards ‘excellence’ and ‘access’ simultaneously, even though they might require slightly different pedagogical approaches. Recognizing when to emphasize which approach takes some practice.

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

ETHICAL VS TECHNICAL

Thus, a dialogic approach might also help to resolve the apparently dichotomous positions of how we might teach. Wayne Bowman writes,

‘we may engage in musicking and teaching either technically or ethically; they may be undertaken either with technical or ethical intent … these represent two fundamentally different approaches, embodying two very different kinds of know-how’ where an ethical approach conceives of ‘music and music education as human interactions … special kinds of know-how that take their guidance from ethical considerations – from things like care and caring – rather than from compliance with “objective” standards’.

(2009: 115)

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

Striking the right balance between more directive ‘teaching’ and more delegated ‘facilitation’ is an important part of the teaching musician’s approach to teaching and learning, not just in their longer term reflections on their practice, but often very much in the moment, as part of their ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön 1984) whilst actually delivering activity. Having a plan (monologic), but deciding to abandon it because the participants want to take the music in a different direction to the one planned (dialogic) might require bravery on the part of the new leader, but is the ‘stock-in-trade’ of the experienced community musician. Indeed, planning activities with the expectation of negotiating and ultimately ceding ownership of the process to the learners often leads to the most engaging activities. And subsequently re-negotiating the process back to a performance focus can also often lead to the most exciting musical outcomes.

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

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

(Price 2013: 193)

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

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

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

(Wegerif 2012)

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

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

PRESENTATIONAL VS PARTICIPATORY

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

Situations of participatory music-making are not just informal or amateur, that is, lesser versions of the ‘real music’ made by the pros but that, in fact, they are something else – a different form of art and activity entirely – and that they should be conceptualised and valued as such.

(Turino 2008: 25)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As mentioned earlier, I was closely involved with Sage Gateshead’s CM traineeship, which used the principles of Situated Learning (Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, 1991) and dialogic pedagogical methods to induct over 100 musicians from all backgrounds and disciplines over a ten-year period into the practices of Participatory Music or CM. The success of that model led to Reflect, Sage Gateshead’s national co-mentoring project for Creative Education.
Partnerships (Renshaw and Smith 2010, 2008; Renshaw 2008) which experimented to considerable effect in opening up ‘dialogic space’ between practitioners from diverse communities of practice, and found that, ‘cross-sector reflective dialogue, that connects to its context and is grounded in evidence-based practice, is pivotal in strengthening the quality of partnership practice and collaborative creative work’ (Renshaw 2008: 6). Peter Renshaw’s further work with Barbican-Guildhall, ‘choreographing and sustaining a collective “conversation” or reflective dialogue aimed at facilitating cultural change’ (Linden and Renshaw [2004] 2010: 27) continues to emphasize the value of a dialogic approach to organizational development, and ArtWorks North East’s Peer Artist Learning project mentioned earlier highlights the value of ‘the time and space for structured reflection in supporting [artists] to develop insights into themselves, their practice, the practices of others and the sector in general’ (Camlin 2012b: 14).

Maybe it’s still fairly early days for these kind of dialogic approaches to teaching and learning, but I think that an appreciation of them – as evidenced by some of the above examples – could help to remove some of the ‘reluctance’ we’ve traditionally had about conceptualizing our practice, opening up new avenues and possibilities for articulating our practical truths in more academic terms, and provide more appealing routes to accreditation of those practices, and a broader ‘professionalization’ of the sector. Being able to talk about our practices without risking the loss of their unique situatedness, or reducing them to more ‘defined’ and correspondingly exclusive and excluding concepts, means increasing the dialogic space between us. In the United Kingdom, these principles are already finding their way into postgraduate curricula, as evidenced in, for example, the recent ArtWorks NE postgraduate short courses (Artworks 2013), Trinity-Laban’s new postgraduate course, The Teaching Musician (Trinity-Laban 2014), and Barbican-Guildhall’s ongoing developments (Gregory and Renshaw 2013), to name but three.

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

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

**COLLABORATIVE DESIGN – DIALOGIC TOOLS FOR LEARNING TOGETHER**

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

> The concept of education afforded by print is a form of monologic which can be summarized as the transmission of true representations. The concept of education afforded by the Internet is a form of dialogic which can be summarized as participation in ongoing enquiry in an unbounded context.

> Before mass print-based education, culture everywhere was largely oral and thinking was mostly understood in terms of dialogues. (Wegerif 2012)

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

Dialogic pedagogy might be an educational idea whose time is ripe, as it responds to the way that our culture’s relationship with knowledge is fundamentally changing because of the affordances of the Internet. And those of us working in Participatory Arts may have more to contribute to the debate than we imagine, as our situated *communities of practice*, and our approaches to learning, have grown and developed in dialogic ways, even though our reluctance to conceptualize our work as such may have hitherto left us without the language to properly articulate the value of our experiences. As colleagues...
in the formal music education sector begin to, ‘explore a way of thinking about pedagogy derived from dialogic theories of education and, in particular, consider the significance of creating “dialogic space” as a dimension of a pedagogy for music’ (Finney 2013: 3) there is a valuable role that community musicians and other artists working in participatory settings can play in shaping this emergent discourse. Just as

the praxial turn affords a significant opportunity to reconceptualize music education as something explicitly committed to moral growth and social transformation, a move that might well permit us to do something meaningful about the ever more marginal status of music education in today’s schools and today’s society.

(Bowman 2005: 74)

So too, a dialogic turn might afford us the opportunity for even more voices to be heard and accounted.

I said at the outset that I was not setting out to provide any kind of definitive perspective, and nor am I. Dialogics is not the perspective, merely a perspective. As Pablo Helguera reminds us, ‘to impose a sort of methodology, or ‘school of thought’ onto the practice would only create an interpretation of art-making that the next artist will inevitably challenge, as part of the natural dynamics of art’ (2011) Cynics might see the current quest for a ‘new paradigm’ to describe the work as casting around to replace one monology with another, to devise new sets of excluding language that ultimately only serve to reinforce our divisions. Do we really need to add Dialogic Pedagogy to the already long list of learning theories? Without wishing to argue a special case for dialogics in the debate, the notion of dialogue provides us not just with another pedagogical frame, but also with a conceptual frame where everyone is free to make sense of their practice in a way that speaks to them. The wonderful paradox of dialogics is that if you do not see it as a valid or useful way of conceptualizing the work, that’s great! In rejecting it as a frame for regarding your practice, the dialogic space surrounding the work is widened, as it begs the question, ‘if not dialogics, then what?’. Choose something else. Or invent something. It raises the level of debate while maintaining empty, welcoming places around the table to be filled with as-yet-unheard perspectives. It also provides a valid way of conceptualizing the work for those of us who would rather not have our practice categorized, or made subject to rigid taxonomies.

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

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