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Interdisciplinary collaboration and studio based music composers in Higher Education: a longitudinal case study of practice and discussion of emerging themes.

‘...any joint activity has multiple agendas, goals, contexts, tasks, and actors with different intentions. It involves dynamics of agreement, disagreement, and coordination of participants’ contributions.’

(Masutov, 1996, p31-32).

There is scope for misunderstanding and possibly conflict to emerge when undergraduates work together, particularly in creative context where formal assessment is involved; ‘Risk taking is a particularly urgent concern for young artists who are faced with the challenge of gaining recognition whilst also testing their own sense of worth and promise.’ (John-Steiner, 2000, p79). Drawing on the salient theoretical concerns of joint creativity in academic contexts. This paper reflected on such themes in relation to a specific longitudinal case study of four undergraduates (two studio based sound composers, a dancer and a video artists) working together on an interdisciplinary creative project.

Through the 1990s research exploring creativity started to focus on examining joint creativity in social contexts (Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009 p81), and for some time socioculturally grounded research has been scrutinizing the educational value of collaborations between children in various contexts; exploring further the impact of joint working on individual learning and intersubjective development. Some distinctions between different types of collaboration have been documented, and participant familiarity and shared knowledge have been noted to be important factors in various studies exploring joint creativity and situated learning.

Within music, studies of collaboration are just starting to become more prominent in research of joint creativity. The studies that examine music composers working in academic contexts however predominantly explore collaborative practice amongst musicians (McCutchan, 1999, MacDonald & Miell, 2000 & 2000b, Hewitt, A., 2002, Seddon, 2005, St John, 2006, Ginsborg, J., Chaffin, R., Nicholson, G., 2006, King, 2006, Miell & Littleton, 2007, Blank & Davidson, 2007, Sawyer, 2003, 2006 & 2008, Hargreaves, 2008) or with technology (Nuhn et. Al, 2002, Theureau & Donin, 2005, King & Vickers, 2007, Hewitt, 2008) rather than students from other disciplines.

My own PhD research explores joint creativity, interdisciplinary collaboration and socially situated learning in a context where studio based music composers collaborate with students from other creative and performing arts disciplines. Existing studies offer grounding for investigating longer term collaborations such

as these, so my own work explores collaborations characterized by a particular situation: studio based composers, collaborating on creative projects with students from other disciplines, such as digital video, dance and theatre. The students that I have been observing have also been working within a formally assessed academic context for at least one term within creative circumstances where the form of the creative product itself is devised jointly by the group; so it grows from the joint working process rather than a shared repertoire (Jazz) or a score.

Whilst individual case studies do not of course speak for other situations, after considering contemporary research in joint musical creativity I have started to explore what affords and constrains creative working in this context. Guided by the emergent themes of related studies, this work examines the dynamic interlace of collaborative form, joint development, situated learning and creative trajectory in situations where studio composers are involved in interdisciplinary joint creativity.

This presentation presented salient theoretical ideas as well as some of the issues emerging from my PhD research. Since this work is part of a part-time PhD analytic methods and findings will not be posted or published until the study is complete.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a PALATINE Development Award that is being run collaboratively across York StJohn, Huddersfield and Hull Universities: <http://www.palatine.ac.uk/development-awards/1542/>
If you have 10 minutes free we would sincerely value your participation in an on-line survey exploring interdisciplinary collaboration teaching in HE. Please e-mail me directly for the link.

Liz Dobson

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