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## **Liberating Music: Using Music in Schools to Express Religious Diversity and to Resolve Religious Conflict**

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### **Background**

The paper explores some possible uses of music to understand, express and promote diversity - in this case, religious and cultural and political diversity - in schools. This is a model of arts based creative communication, of dialogue, rather than an empirical study of the influence of music - although the latter will indeed be completed as part of the same project. It is one element in an attempt to recover the positive forms of 'performance' and 'performativity' in school education, and to move debates on 'creativity' towards the original creation of meanings, things and people.

### **Research Questions**

Creativity is a concept that helps distinguish routine transferring of information from meaning-making and, more broadly, from 'generative' work in schools. What can be missed from creativity policies is the use of specific 'art forms' (music, in this case) as pedagogic tools, and the connections between creativity narrowly defined and religious and philosophical issues related to creation, creativity, and human nature (Buber 2002, chapter 3). Nevertheless, creativity is described as involving 'the use of imagination and intellect to generate ideas, insights and solutions to problems and challenges'; when '[c]oupled with critical thinking, which involves evaluative reasoning, creative activity can produce outcomes that can be original, expressive and have value' (QCA 2008). That is, there is reference to the agency of the person being creative (imagination, thinking, reasoning), the originality of the processes or products (generate, original, expressive), and the value of that generated (solutions, evaluative, value) (as in Stern 2007, p 124-126). Such policies can be challenged by high-stakes testing and other forms of 'performativity' in education. Ironically, music and other performance-based creative arts are themselves in danger from performative cultures in schools, where those are directed towards a narrow range of external measures.

Going beyond performing arts (and music in particular) being seen as subject disciplines distinctively helping fulfil the need for pupils to be creative, or as 'entertainment' (Paton 2010), and going beyond generic 'creative teaching' (Ofsted 2010), this research investigates the educative, dialogic, role of music. More specifically, it investigates the possibilities of music being used to develop cultural and religious understanding (a way of communicating religious and cultural diversity) and even more powerfully the possibilities of music as a method of understanding and resolving conflict, especially religiously-based conflict.

Dialogue and educational creativity is theorised from the philosophy of Martin Buber (1958 and notably Buber 2002), and it is his approach to religious diversity and the creation of social justice through dialogue, that underpins the whole research. Working in Germany until 1938, and then in Jerusalem until his death in 1965, Buber was familiar with the challenges of religiously-based conflict and its resolution. The research question raised by his philosophy, is whether music-based pedagogy in schools is or can be dialogic, and whether this approach does or could be used to promote social justice.

### **Methods**

The paper forms one strand of research on The Spirit of the School (Stern 2009), an international research project currently active in the UK, Hong Kong, and the USA, with published findings (in Stern 2009) generated from empirical research in 13 UK and Chinese schools, including in-depth interviews and other activities with 144 pupils, teachers and headteachers/principals. This investigated the

nature of dialogue, community and learning in those schools, and it built on earlier research on the relationship between schools and religions (e.g. Stern 2007), and on the use of music in education as a form of educational inclusion (e.g. Stern 2004, and see Nesbitt 2004).

## **Frame**

The analysis of policy and curriculum documents related to music, religious education, and social justice, is complemented by how children and adults understand inclusion and opportunities to communicate with people within and beyond schools.

## **Research findings**

Results of this research are being developed into a series of strategy and pedagogic documents, promoting the pedagogic use of music, a 'supremely a corporate activity' (Bowker 1997, p 667), to develop the understanding of religion and the resolution of conflict (as music 'draws people into an experience of community and togetherness', Ruppell and Schreiner 2003, p 165), working with professional and university-based groups such as the national association for teachers of religious education, a diocesan education board, a centre for church schools, a religious education centre, and a centre for global education. It is hoped that the outcomes of this research and professional work will put music at the centre of debates on pedagogy and intercultural dialogue.

Along with the publications already produced, it is expected that this paper will be published as a separate contribution to the academic literature on the pedagogy of arts based education.

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