

A CASE IN POINT:  
THE USE OF CREATIVE MUSIC EDUCATION IN MUSIC THERAPY

Mary Rykov, M.T.A.

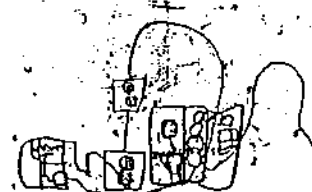
This paper and presentation is about and for Patrick, with whom I discovered that the oldest sound on the piano keyboard lies under the sixth leger line beyond the bass clef, and so much more.



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Patrick was diagnosed as communication disordered by the treatment centre he attended from 3-6 years of age (Blenheim House, Vancouver, B.C.). He displayed many autistic tendencies and was intellectually untestable. Patrick's mother requested music therapy for him because of the general relaxation he had experienced from sessions in the past. Upon enrollment in music therapy at the Vancouver Academy of Music in March, 1982, Patrick was 7.4 years old and attended a special class within a public school.

Patrick described this black pastel drawing (Session 3, March, 1982) as "wires leading to a machine, leading to a machine, leading to a machine that makes the piano work." At this time his piano improvisations were characterized by fixated meter and rhythms at the low end of the keyboard and consistent loud dynamic bordering on banging. He maintained little eye contact and required reminders for social greetings and partings. Patrick avoided verbal interaction by asking numerous questions and was easily distracted by extraneous objects in the room. He rejected musical interactions initiated by myself by brushing my hands from the piano keyboard or drowning out other instrumental sounds.



This brown pastel drawing (Session 6, April, 1982) depicts direct connection between a player and the piano. Patrick was still not initiating or tolerating interaction at this time, yet his improvisations were beginning to lose their fixated quality. During the following weeks embellished organization in his improvisations resulted from his greater use of contrasting sound elements.



Patrick arrived early to his 9th Session to find me playing the piano. He was immediately fascinated by the music notation and wanted to know about it. Patrick was now initiating interaction to learn, and he retained what he learned from week to week. The content of his sessions suddenly changed from solitary improvisation to an interactive learning situation punctuated by improvisation in which I was now allowed to participate. This continued until his last (13th) Session before the summer break.

Patrick was demonstrating enjoyment of cognitive challenge, yet he still had a low tolerance for frustration and a limited attention span for listening. I was faced with the task of satisfying his interest in music without jeopardizing the therapeutic objectives of facilitating emotional release and self-expression, and encouraging interpersonal interaction. I began to examine the underlying principles of music instruction in an attempt to understand how children learn music. I was striving for a flexibility of approach that would be suitable to Patrick's learning style and therapeutic needs.

I discovered that no theory of music instruction exists (Laske, 1976). In fact, the assumptions of how children learn music (Zimmerman, 1974; Simons, 1978) are currently being questioned along with the prevailing skill-based methodologies employed to teach them (Bamberger, 1972; Walker, 1982), 1983).

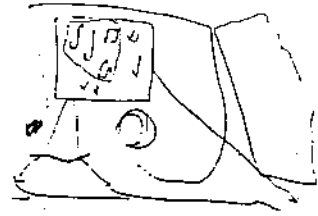
An alternative to skill-based methods exists in the cognitive conception of music and art (Perkins and Leonard, 1977). This orientation stresses the creative problem-solving and intuitive/experiential learning that is commonly by-passed by traditional instructional practices.

Creative music education assumes this cognitive premise. It is an orientation that advocates a dynamic, immediate, child-centered, discovery approach to music making and music learning through composition. Creative music composition entails an exploratory process that is as important as the resulting music product. And it is because of this process that the music is truly creative and not merely a re-creating, re-structuring, or interpretation of pre-existing patterns. Creative music composition, furthermore, introduces children to the current reality of contemporary music - i.e., the here and now of the child's musical present.

My intention here is not to denigrate the acquisition of concrete music skills and the transmission of factual-historical-cultural knowledge. These objectives are certainly valid in and of themselves. But in the absence of creative self-expression, the full potential for knowledge gained from music remains unrealized. A cognitive approach to music that enables problem-solving and intuitive-experiential learning balances the unimodal learning that occurs through skill-based methodologies alone.

When Patrick's sessions resumed in September 1982 creative music composition afforded me opportunities to offer him cognitive challenges without compromising his therapeutic objectives. For Patrick, creative music composition was the process of taking the free-form music therapy improvisation and documenting it because it was a "good idea," because it expressed something worth repeating, again and again. When asked whether the following composition (October, 1982) had a title, Patrick emphatically replied, "It's not called anything. It's not supposed to be anything. It's music. And if I could tell you what it was I wouldn't have to play it!" Patrick's symbolic notation became more specifically symbol per sound as the year progressed.

Similarly, he grew increasingly more articulate verbalizing his ideas and feelings. By the end of the 1982-1983 school year (32 sessions) he was disclosing and discussing immediate issues and concerns.



Patrick has continued to organize, express and document his own sound with renewed interest in standard music notation. "Good Song" (December, 1984) was his first assisted effort. In addition he is now interested in the ideas and sounds of others.

His analysis of music listening experiences (classical and contemporary genres) are indicating aesthetic insight and awareness



well beyond his years. At school he has reached grade level in arithmetic and is gaining steady ground in reading after a late start. Initially intense, withdrawn and resistive to any interpersonal interaction, Patrick, now at 9.6 years of age (April, 1984) is able to laugh, play and express his ideas and feelings both musically and verbally.

I endorse creative music education as a means of co-active discovery learning for both instructor and instructed that is consistent with therapeutic process. Creative music education affords rich common ground between music therapy and music education, the possibilities for integration with other curricular areas, as well as activities suitable for the full integration of handicapped / non-handicapped student groups.

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