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# Preparing Musicians to Create Music with Children in Schools

## Professional Training in the French CFMI as a Practical Approach to Understanding and Enhancing Music Made by Children

In France, as in many other countries, the official curriculum for musical education in primary schools has seen a gradually increase in the inclusion of creative activities over the last few decades. “Exploring, imagining, and creating” has become of equal importance to “singing and performing” and “listening and comparing”. This mirrors an important change in thinking and practice directly linked to professional training. Since the 1980s, the French training centres for musicians in schools (Centre de Formation de Musiciens Intervenant à l'école, known as CFMI) have been developing a general approach toward fostering children's creative abilities in the field of music.

Primary school in France includes Nursery school (*École maternelle*) for children aged from two or three to five, and Elementary school (*École élémentaire*) attended by children aged six to ten. All primary school teachers are trained as generalists and have to teach the whole curriculum throughout the school year, including music as a compulsory subject. As their professional training contains only a very few hours of music, their approach to teaching music is influenced by the personal musical background and abilities of the individual generalist teacher, and so remains in fact highly varied in quality, scope and quantity.

For many decades now, specialists employed by local authorities have been contributing to Primary school education in France. These external contributors (*intervenants*) support the generalist teachers in the scope of educational and artistic projects linked to other disciplines and activities in class. They also establish partnerships with local cultural and artistic institutions (such as music schools, local bands, orchestras, auditoriums and theatres) in order to allow children to take part in the cultural life of the community.

In the 1980s, wishing to generalise quality music education, the French Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture decided to create nine training centres delivering a university diploma for professional musicians in schools, the CFMI. Since then around

5,000 musicians have been professionally trained and the number of children practicing (or having practiced) music in school with them is estimated at more than half a million. The CFMI provide 1,500 hours of professional and academic training including 500 hours of internship in schools. The Guidelines established by the French Council of CFMI define the musician in school as both a “musician and educator” possessing the following skills:

“1. Musical and artistic skills: Musicians in schools are practising musicians who have been fully trained as instrumentalists or singers. [...] They are able to improvise on their main instrument or vocally or with the instruments at hand and can explore and develop sound resources by experimenting and classifying, using various objects, and by making instruments by themselves.

2. Teaching skills: Through their presence, their musical commitment, and the importance they place on artistic standards, they help learners to reveal their musical sensitivity. [...] They encourage initiative, creativity, and discernment in the learning process. [...] They invent situations that allow learners to experience performing, inventing, and listening to music of different sorts.” (Conseil des CFMI 2005, pp. 4–5)

The CFMI prioritises collective music creation both in training sessions and in practical teaching in classes to foster the students’ music creative skills and potential. In doing so, it has been inspired by the basic principles developed in the twentieth century by several pedagogical movements (the Modern School Movement, the New Education Movement, Institutional Pedagogy and also Popular Education): principles such as collaborative, co-operative, and inquiry-based learning, aiming for emancipation, self-expression, and self-fulfilment for each and every one. Why should children be empowered to invent their own music and how can this be done in the frame of every day practice in the classroom? What exactly is the role of the adult in this process? Are there methods, approaches or skills to be learnt? CFMI students are encouraged to build up ways of helping children empirically, by trying out and critically questioning both music playing and teaching practices, rather than relying on ready-made instructions. In this context they have to comprehend some essential notions about playing, composing, improvising, and creating music today.

## Composing Music

In a context and climate of cross-cultural practices and perceptions of music, any fixed notion of what composing can be has been thoroughly deconstructed during the twentieth century. Nowadays, it is clearer than ever that the processes of making music are as diverse as musicians themselves. In this context it can be helpful to clarify which criteria distinguish music from noise and what is a musical idea. At least since the invention of *Musique concrète*, we know that music is not necessarily a combination of determined pitches and metric rhythms unfolding in traditional forms, but that the voluntary arrangement of sounds can

be a sufficient if not a determining criterion. On the other hand, anthropology and sociology show us how and why music comes into being; when humans interact by the means of sounds, as for example in collective social settings such as rites or celebrations. As a working hypothesis we can admit that music is given when sounds are used and combined intentionally, in order to express some energy or state of emotion, or else when sound events are created to be heard by others, which implies a relationship between inventors, performers, and listeners. We can also admit that music allows the suggestion of expression: although not as precise as a spoken language, it is still of relevance to the listener.

Schoenberg's concept of the "musical idea" developed in *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation* (2006), emphasises the relationship between composers and listeners in their comprehension of a work's unity. To define a musical idea, Schoenberg insists on the wholeness of the musical work involving "motive, gestalt, phrase, theme, rhythm, harmony and form" put into relation according to an "inner necessity"; in other words, an intention and its expression, arousing in conscious, unconscious, or subconscious ways. In creative group situations, this inner necessity often takes the shape of a spontaneous collective consensus, emerging with some evidence to the players.

If we cannot control where ideas come from, we can at least induce their arrival. Houmann emphasises that, "creativity can be engaged intentionally as an outcome of pedagogical work" (Houmann 2014, p. 188). In practice, the principal criteria of interaction, organisation, and intention may be a starting point to set up situations and targets, leading children to create music and to evaluate the results of their attempts, whereas the idea of some coherent wholeness relevant to listeners can guide the research of a lasting form.

## Playing Music

According to theories about the playing of children developed by Winnicott (1971), any adult or child is capable of creativity. Addison suggests that "music is essentially a 'play' department of human life" (Addison 1991, p. 213) and Delalande (1984) that "music is a child's play". We may therefore suggest that making music is above all a part or type of play for children. This remains a notion of music still present in our thinking and language, that is, music is to be played.

Music can also be considered as a specific and fundamental form of human communication. Harrison & Pound remind us that children improvise musically and linguistically from an early age. They define improvisation as the "talk" of music. In their "talking music" approach they state that "all children are musical and able to express themselves through music. This will entail an emphasis on the expressive and functional aspects of music, rather than on the acquisition of technical skill for its own sake" (Harrison & Pound 1992, p. 237). Glover also draws a parallel between music and language when reminding us that

“Children’s independent compositional abilities are too easily undermined when music education places value on performing and listening at the expense of improvising and composing. This is the musical equivalent of teaching reading and listening but leaving out speaking and writing.” (Glover 2000, p. 2)

Soulas (1992) has described how children organise themselves to interact when playing music freely. In a setting where children of a primary school class, divided into groups of four or five, were each given a simple percussion instrument and asked to invent some music together, she discerned the following scheme of consecutive phases often appearing:

- Firstly every child explores his or her instrument without paying attention to other players.
- The children start to look and listen at each other and to seek attention.
- They start to interact by responding directly and musically to some proposition; they also interact verbally.
- They organise their playing by determining some rules (such as: “we firstly play in turns and then all together”) and they try to anticipate the beginning and ending of their piece.
- They define visual or sound signals for this purpose and often choose a leader to give them.
- They once or several times rehearse the chosen proceedings, sometimes modifying or extending them with new ideas or spontaneous improvisations.

This shows that children are able to organise themselves as music players; the general proceedings, such as common rule-defining, being very close to any other play between children. When creating music with children, we have to be ready to play with them and to allow them to play with music. According to the principles of group dynamics revealed by Anzieu & Martin (1990), the collective situation in class is most favourable to the undertaking of creative work. However, as Addison notes, “the association of the word ‘play’ with schooling is still a subject of extreme controversy, [...] the voluntariness of play—we choose to play—and the ‘work-at-our-play’ elements are particularly crucial in this connection” (Addison 1991, p. 213). His notion of “work-play”, recovering playfulness and voluntariness as well as seriousness and willing concentration, is close to the ideas of Authelain (1995), who insists that creating music calls for audacity but also for working on ideas. This implies that we certainly can build on children’s ability to express themselves by the means of sounds, rhythm, voice, and so on, but that we also have to help them to develop their findings and to work out structures for composing. This tallies with a “process-oriented approach of artistry” in music education as proposed by De Baets (2013).

## Creating Music with Children

What do we mean by creating music? Do we mean any activity in class arousing and involving creativity by exploring and playing with sounds? Do we mean group improvisation? Do we mean a process leading to recording or performing on stage? Do we mean composing by writing down notation on paper or by using sound editor software? Do we mean a general approach including all these possibilities and more? We also need a vision of what can be expected of children. What can children's music be like and how may it sound? Are there specific features to "children's music"?

In French, *création* means both a process involving and arousing creativity and an achievement, the result of a creative process. Creation may include both composition and improvisation. Examining the "experiential differences between improvisation and composition in children's music-making", Burnard worked them out as different experiences of "lived time, lived body, lived relations and lived space" (Burnard 2000, p. 242). Improvisation is not meant to last or be repeated. It can be considered as an instant composition or creation on the spot. It can also be used as a step leading to a lasting form.

For the practitioner it is important to understand that creation is a process involving choices at every step from the beginning to the end, between all the possibilities offered by the materials and the implements available, and by the abilities and wishes of all the players. It is a constant process of opening and limiting a range of possibilities, of diverging and converging thinking, of imagining and acting in turn. In class, the practitioner has to organise this dynamic process by resolving the following questions: Which choices are to be made, when, how and by whom? When is it necessary to intervene and when to let things happen spontaneously?

To begin, the process of music creation needs a context, a pretext, a starting point, real or imaginary, for example, an object or picture, a poem or story, a character, emotion, or situation. It can also be any idea born out of improvisation or sudden inspiration, and of course it always requires some sound material. The outcome, whether it is a song, instrumental piece, recording, or a stage performance, may be more or less unknown at the beginning. This may influence and guide the way to starting and proceeding with the process. As there are potentially an infinite number of materials and ideas available, the making of decisions is one of the most challenging tasks in a collective creative process. It requires both pedagogical and artistic abilities. Generally, children have many more ideas than is possible to retain in one piece of music. In order to help them make choices, the practitioner has to establish criteria and artistic standards that children can understand and agree with. Their role is not only to define or explain these criteria, for example, to distinguish an original proposition from a common stereotype, but above all to allow the young listeners to appreciate them fully by finding in them a means by which to relate to any kind of music on their own terms. The professional musician needs to be able to discover, distinguish,

value, and develop originality, above all by listening to the children themselves. Originality may appear as an unexpected combination of already existing elements, as well as an unexpected way of expressing emotions, or through the unexpected appearance of faculties and skills previously unknown to them in producing sounds or music. If encouraged and stimulated in class, it can appear at any time. When it comes to artistry, the unknown, unpredictable, and unexpected are indeed of vital importance and we need to make place for it, otherwise we are not creating but simply copying. As Krämer states, "Art is created when the human being implants himself [...], with his individuality and his own perspective, in the artefact he creates and it is only this that gives it meaning", because "our relationship to art is not a functional but a personal one" (Krämer 2013, p. 39).

## Professional Training in Practice

Helping children to create music in class means that the practitioner must allow both himself and the children to play with ideas, take risks, experience the unusual, and to make decisions and choices. If we are to accept the concept that children can indeed create their own music, to what extent is an adult's input necessary? Are children aware of the difference between playing with sounds and producing music? If creating music means imagining and anticipating sound events intentionally, and then putting them into an order which can be repeated and performed as often as wished, how can we help children to achieve this? Is it necessary to start by establishing fixed targets and striving for a defined result, or is this counterproductive? During professional training in the CFMI, every musician needs to find theoretical and practical answers to these questions by working on the subject with children in various situations, and analysing his or her work with an awareness of further experiences and research, so as to build a general approach which can be applied to a variety of situations. There are a lot of ways to create music, but whatever the implements or forms used, there are steps to be taken and skills to be mastered.

The following criteria established by the teaching staff at CFMI Lyon, are used for observing and evaluating practical teaching in class, and can help us to understand the role of the adult and the stages involved throughout the creative process. They summarise a general approach. These steps are not necessarily followed in a chronological order and can be applied several times during the creative process. Creating music, like doing research, progresses in spiral rather than linear movements. During their two-year professional and academic training at the CFMI, musicians learn how to

- encourage children to express themselves spontaneously by playing with all kinds of sounds;
- receive their propositions with interest and responsiveness;

- help children to vary and develop their inventions, for example, by listening to a wide range of music;
- support them in inventing and transforming musical motives and patterns;
- help them to organise these motives and patterns so as to create a form;
- support them in presenting the resulting form to an audience.

The practitioner firstly needs to put some sound material at the children's disposal, with the awareness that creativity and creative work are stimulated rather than limited by constraints. Using a single and identical object often produces more interesting results than a range of instruments. The use of warm-up sessions promotes a "fun" environment and can help the children to feel more confident which encourages both spontaneous individual and/or group improvisations. The intentional and conscious use of tones and sound parameters can be a first outcome of the children's research. At this stage the adults must allow and accept disorder and noise, and give the children time to take over the sound material in their own way. They must allow them to play and interact without guidance or instruction, and instead observe and listen. To facilitate this approach, professional training has to impart the principles and the techniques of learning by doing and a child-centred approach of teaching.

An important element for making music together is listening. By listening to children from a musician's point of view, the professional demonstrates that a child's production is or can be of musical interest. Recording may come in useful here for further analysis. More importantly at this stage are the initial musical interactions between the adult musician and some or all of the children. When joining in to play with them, by using the same objects, voice or personal instrument in response, we begin to understand that the sounds, motives, or patterns children produce are indeed musical. In essence, responsiveness lies in a musician's capacity to pick up and use, to vary and develop the children's musical creation, such as, for example, by improvisation. Therefore, the training of non-verbal interaction and communication through music and the practice of improvisation in a wide aesthetic and technical range are vital, and form a large part of professional training at the CFMI.

Another method used to develop children's sound productions is to have them compare their productions with other forms of music, identifying any similarities or contrasts. This can be helpful at any stage of the creative process, as a starting point, when at a loss for ideas, or in need of a structure, or simply in order to value and to legitimate some audacious expression. Using this technique, children can develop their baseline understanding of tone colours, structures and patterns and draw on these ideas at the very beginning of the creative process. Glover states that "listening together, to compositions by pupils or by others, builds a basis for the ongoing critical reflection on music that is also a key in composition development" (Glover 2000, p. 131). In any case, the practitioner's

choices must be pertinent if they are to nourish the child's inventiveness and enhance their capacity for musical construction. For all these reasons, professional training develops the knowledge of a wide range of music and especially new forms of musical inventions and encounters. It also enables the practitioner to make music more accessible to children by listening analytically to different styles of music in class, and by providing adequate verbal interaction and communication combined with non-verbal expression through body movements.

One of the most important skills to master when creating music in class is setting targets, during the planning stage and spontaneously during lessons, taking into account the children's intentions. At this stage, the sharing of competencies with other generalist teachers comes in especially useful. His or her knowledge of the class permits the formation of effective working groups, for example, of four to five children, to carry out inventive tasks. If short pieces created in such settings are meant to be a starting point to a more elaborate piece of music, further constraints in order to refine or develop sound events further must be found, without restraining new possibilities of expression. For example, to stabilise a motive or a nascent form, children may be asked to repeat their piece several times identically and furthermore to play "more and more" (or "less and less") by finding their own way to meet this target. In general, this leads to effects such as *crescendo* or *decrescendo*, *accelerando* or *ritardando*. It can also lead to accumulation (by adding more and more players or instruments), or by playing more in or out of tune, rhythm or meter. Children can also be asked to find other forms of repetition, variation, contrast, or effects to represent a particular emotional state.

As a further step, several short pieces can be played successively; gestural expression can be added, for example, in order to create a transition between two short pieces. To find a general form, mathematical principles such as series or traditional forms (rondo, verse/chorus) can be used, but it is essential to remain alert and able to deal with unexpected ideas and forms. This requires the capacity to improvise both in music and in teaching. According to De Baets, "the artistry of the music teacher lies within the extent to which he can use his musical competences in 'immediate' teaching situations" (De Baets 2013, pp. 203–204). Indeed, it has often been observed that beginners tend to simplify challenging and complex musical propositions too hastily, believing that they might be too difficult to reproduce. But using them to identify new targets in order to train the whole group is an excellent means of developing and mastering new skills. By building on children's competencies, the practitioner allows them not only to gain self-confidence by becoming involved in the musical activity by mobilising their internal motivation, but to attain higher artistic standards.

To some extent, creating music can be likened to playing with Lego or solving a puzzle, either in a logical, chosen order or at random. Most of the time a careful analysis of the child's own productions holds some answers to the challenge of finding a structure. When



listening to the recordings repeatedly, children may find some with the help of adults. Then the discussion of ideas can take place which leads to the discovery of new or definitive rules for playing together. Adult expertise is generally needed here to facilitate a useful and comprehensive analysis by questioning the children effectively, helping them to put sound events and parameters into words, and providing an aesthetic and artistic argumentation in the reach of children before setting them to work again or fixing on a form. To elaborate and memorise such a form, children need to build up a mental representation of their music. Any kind of visual coding can be helpful here, but the professional must be aware of the fact that music simultaneously follows chronological and superimposed principles in perception and thinking. This highly complex task can only be achieved correctly by taking into account the children's individual mental development, in particular their anticipation skills and capacity for symbolic and abstract thinking. Professional training therefore imparts some essential knowledge of the child's mental and cognitive development.

Creating music entails both individual initiative and collective settings. The practitioner has to handle both in turn. Each child needs to find a place and to feel at ease in the common task or performance, according to his or her abilities. However, making artistic choices means abandoning many ideas which can provoke frustration. The adult, therefore, has to act as an artist providing and explaining aesthetic criteria, and as an educationist ready to face and resolve conflicts. During professional training, CFMI students acquire a basic knowledge of group dynamics and management as well as practical leadership skills.

The sharing of music is both challenging and enhancing. Performing or presenting music to an audience, or making it available for listening in other ways, requires rehearsing to reach a suitable standard for presentation. The professional competencies required here include many aspects similar to the preparation of a musical presentation. However, it has often been observed that children performing their own music are likely to demonstrate an increased amount of concentration, engagement, and independence, especially when acting alongside professional musicians. In any case this process involves evaluation before, during, and after the presentation, through critical reflection and feedback during the planning, developing, and rehearsing stages as well as post-performance.

According to Glover, "There is surprisingly little clarity as to what children's own music sounds like, what can be expected of children as composers, or how composing in school might connect to the musical worlds beyond" (Glover 2000, p. 2). Indeed, music made by children needs to become visible and audible in the community and the wider field of musical creativity. Fortunately some schedulers and even a few editors have started to address these questions. In France, *Momeludies éditions* have been publishing since the 1980s a great number of compositions in various contemporary styles, especially written for school classes by composers living today. One of the main purposes of this non-profit organisation is to sustain and stimulate children's creativity, especially by its collection *Musemporaines*. Indeed, many of these pieces include parts for free interpretation or improvisation. Some of

them are not music scores strictly speaking, but merely playing rules or “plans” suggesting a scenic view, linked to a particular sound ambience or atmosphere whereby the music is to be invented by the children themselves. A study of the composers’ different methods for presenting written music can help children to chart their musical ideas. Several pieces entirely invented with and by children have also been published by this editor. For musicians working with children, such a repertoire is a real goldmine of inspiration.

To summarise, creating music with children entails moving through a process of exploration, drafting, developing, refining, and completing, whilst making decisions and choices at any of these stages. To acquire the competencies necessary to guide such a process, during professional training several complementary elements are most important: a direct and personal experience of improvising and creating music by the means of collective settings between musicians, practical training in schools with children in the frame of work placements, and in both cases, as an essential correlate, constant analysis and reflexivity by the means of regular group and self-evaluations in a climate of confidence and mutual benevolence. This is important because creating is exciting, thrilling, and can be highly satisfying. Facing the unknown, not-yet-existing is an unsecured process with an open end, however, inviting us to explore the unlikely, to take risks, to search and doubt, and obliging us to abandon and to reject. This requires confidence in oneself and the children. Often the first obstacle is to realise that good work can be done by not always acting, but by retreating and allowing the children to act and decide. If the purpose of music education is to learn to express oneself and to communicate through music, and if teaching music means exposing children to valuable new experiences, revealing their sensitivity and creativity, helping them to progress towards mastering new skills and independence in practising, then creating music is indeed teaching at its best.

## Outcomes and Conclusion

The outcomes of such a professional training are both artistic and pedagogical and often unexpected. Firstly, there are innumerable songs, vocal, rhythmic, or instrumental pieces, performed every year by classes on local stages, sometimes with professional musicians. Some of them are published as music scores or distributed across different sound platforms. Secondly, positive changes in social behaviour and group solidarity are often observed in classes. Some children underperforming in other school activities find a way to improve their concentration skills, self-confidence, and learning abilities by creating music. As a more social outcome, creating music with children is an excellent opportunity to integrate elements of different cultural origins, not only in an ethnic but also a social or personal sense. It can enhance mutual recognition, intercultural acceptance, and encourage peaceful living together.

Critically questioning the musical results, we may ask to what extent the outcomes of such creative work can be considered as children's music. The adult musicians involved in the creative process may indeed have a distinctive influence on the artistic result. Their knowledge of aesthetic and formal principles may influence the choices made in the creation of a coherent piece. However, many of the practitioners would agree that the music created in situations involving children would have been entirely different or never have come into being without their ideas and propositions. They also state that the less they have to intervene, the more they are satisfied with their work and its results.

Naturally it takes time for children to reach a standard of expertise and autonomy in creating music together. This is why it is so important to include regular practice in the curriculum activities. In France, the practical creation of music with children has been gaining ground since the last decades of the twentieth century, but there remains a scarcity of systematic and long term studies, and of an identifiable repertoire created by children. CREAMUS of the INA-GRM (*Institut National de l'Audiovisuel – Groupe de Recherche Musicale*) and its programme "Creative Music at School and Beyond" is one of the rare but excellent means of sharing innovative practices and music created by children. For both the practical and the theoretical researcher, this field remains wide open and is certainly worth further investigation.

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