

‘Collaborative creativity’ within a jazz ensemble as a musical and social practice

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Abstract

This article seeks to explore ‘collaborative creativity’ within the musical and social practices of a local jazz ensemble in Ireland. Within this study, concepts of creativity are firmly rooted within socio-cultural contexts where practices are ‘situated’ and ‘collective’. Through investigating aspects of ‘collaborative creativity’ practices such as privileging improvisation, maintaining challenge, and building knowledge through leadership and collaboration, the research explores the connections between creativity and collaboration within a genre-specific ensemble. This qualitative case study gathered data from observations, video recordings, interviews and participant logs over a nine-month period. Thus, the varied research methods allowed for both group and individual perspectives to inform the data analysis. The findings illuminate the distinct creativity practices of the jazz ensemble within shared learning processes. Key features of how creativity was led, encouraged, facilitated and negotiated within the jazz ensemble are presented. The case study provides theoretical perspectives rooted in everyday group music making experiences about an important socio-cultural perspective of creativity, both as a musical and social practice.

Keywords;

Collaborative creativity, Jazz, Collective, Practice, Music-making.

1. Introduction and background

In seeking to explore ‘collaborative creativity’ in practice, this case study research examines a local jazz ensemble in Limerick city, Ireland. This serves as a context to understand how ‘collaborative creativity’ was characterised, negotiated, fostered and promoted through leadership and membership within one particular adult musical group. Taking a socio-cultural theoretical lens, the research presents insights into ‘collaborative creativity’ through the musical and social practices of the jazz ensemble in context, and captures members’ perspectives on the creative aspects of these practices.

Through this investigation, the findings intend to challenge assumptions within creativity discourse and particularly add to the knowledge base on ‘collaborative creativity’ within creativity, music and education research. Through providing valid and reliable data about the significant place of creativity in group music making, it is hoped to inform educationalists, policy makers, and academics of the social, ‘lived’, shared learning and meaning making that manifests itself through group creativity practices. Opportunities to foster environments, institutions and communities to further develop collaborative, creative music making experiences are thus highlighted.

1.1. ‘Collaborative creativity’

This article conceptualises ‘creativity’ through the lens of ‘contextualised’ and ‘collaborative’ creativity (Burnard, 2006, 2012b; Craft, 2008; Eteläpelto & Lahti, 2008; Humphreys, 2006; John-Steiner, 2000; Littleton, Rojas-Drummond, & Miell, 2008; Miell & Littleton, 2004; Moran & John-Steiner, 2004; Sawyer, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a). Through this lens, the collaborative processes of group creativity within particular contexts are the focus. Characterising creativity as a group process resonates with Becker’s writing about ‘art worlds’ where he argues, ‘collective action’ is an integral part of any arts collective (Becker, 2008, p.

34). Such groups have the potential to develop what Moran and John-Steiner refer to as ‘creative collaboration’ where both the ‘complementarity’ and the ‘tensions’ within groups help create the right conditions for creativity to occur (John-Steiner, 2000; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Moran & John-Steiner, 2004). In a study of a long term community of student teachers, Eteläpelto and Lahti (2008) emphasise the importance of shared history within a group for practices of collaborative creativity to develop, claiming, “Out of the history of the group comes the gradual establishment of a certain kind of culture, a customary way of doing things and collaborating” (2008, p. 228).

Within a ‘contextualized’ view of creativity, Lave and Wenger offer some interesting perspectives from a ‘community of practice’ framework. This framework views communities as sites for ‘situated learning’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasising the centrality of acquiring knowledge through participation in socio-cultural contexts. In a similar vein, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) puts forward a concept of ‘situated creativity’ where creativity is viewed as lying within the socio-cultural relationship between person, domain and field – presented as a ‘systems model’ of creativity. Within this jointly constructed model, certain rules and conventions are required within the domain (e.g. jazz music) for creativity to occur. A field of experts, peers and an audience (especially with musical performance) validate creativity and so give it a sense of worth. The person then is required to bring something to the field and domain that is ‘creative’. At its peak, or ‘optimal experience’ individuals are said to experience ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Csikszentmihalyi’s work has influenced this contextualised and collaborative view of creativity within music research where there has been an increased interest in examining collaborative creativity rooted in specific contexts (Burnard, 2012a, 2012b; Colley, Eidsaa, Kenny, & Leung, 2012; John-Steiner, 2000; Kenny, 2014; Littleton & Mercer, 2012; Miell &

Littleton, 2008; Sawyer, 1992, 2003b, 2006b). Burnard's recent work on 'musical creativities of practice' emphasises this socio-cultural view of creativity (2012b, p. 31):

The act of musical creativity establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships between people, between the individual and the social group, between the individual and the society, and between the society and the ever-expanding creative spectrum of web space.

Building on Csikszentmihalyi's 'systems model' and Bourdieuan conceptual tools, Burnard rejects linear or singular conceptions of musical creativity and instead offers a means of understanding the multiple sites of practice(s), relationships, modalities, systems, capitals and innovations that are involved in the practice of creativity. The term 'creativity' then is employed to describe a multiplicity of processes as opposed to a particular outcome (Burnard, 2012b).

Sawyer characterises music as 'a collaborative practice' and 'a communicative activity' (2006b, p. 161). In studying jazz ensembles in particular, where improvisation holds a privileged place within the genre's practices, Sawyer views improvisation as "the extreme case of group creativity" (2003b, p. 13). When players are in the 'improvisation zone' Sawyer claims (2003b, p. 41):

...groups attain flow by staying in the improvisation zone between complete predictability and going too far, between their shared knowledge about conventional situations, and doing something so inconsistent that it just doesn't make sense.

For example, Berliner describes such an outcome as "striking a groove" (1994) while Seddon coins it as "emphatic attunement" where; "improvisers go beyond responding supportively to their fellow musicians and stimulate the conception of new ideas" (2005, p. 50).

The research examined in this article emphasises collaborative creativity as an inherent part of the jazz ensemble's practices. Therefore, the case study presents creativity as a

collaborative endeavour within a real world context, viewed as essentially a social and collective process.

2. The case study

The Limerick Jazz Workshop (LJW) is an adult ensemble-based teaching and performing initiative based in Limerick city, in the mid-west region of Ireland.¹ The LJW was set up in 2007 as a not-for-profit body by members of the Limerick Jazz Society. Some financial and accommodation support is provided through national and local government funding, with the latter demonstrating recent developments in Ireland with regard to local government involvement in the arts (Kenny, 2009, 2011). The LJW aims to promote participation in playing jazz by providing jazz ensemble teaching and performing opportunities with local expert tutors. During the research fieldwork there were over 30 participants representing 14 nationalities within the LJW. The workshop had four instrumental ensembles which ranged from ‘beginners’ to ‘advanced’ status. This research focussed specifically on the ‘advanced’ jazz ensemble, as chosen by the LJW coordinator. The coordinator also played with this ensemble and so acted as a ‘gatekeeper’ from an organisational and practice-based perspective in negotiating access to this group.

The age ranges of the ensemble studied varied from early-20s to mid-50s. There were five male instrumentalists and two female singers, increasing to seven instrumentalists over the data fieldwork period. Two of the members held dual roles alongside being participants in the ensemble. Jimmy, the bass guitarist was the tutor and Eric, the saxophone player was also the overall LJW coordinator. The members had all been with the ensemble over a period of 2–5 years. Four nationalities were represented in the ensemble: Irish, German, Italian and English.

The repertoire chosen (by the tutor and members) was from a broad jazz style and ranged from jazz ‘standards’,² to contemporary jazz, to fusion pieces.

Data were gathered over a nine-month period (October 2010–June 2011) using qualitative research methods to capture both group and individual perspectives from the jazz ensemble. Littleton et al. (2008, p. 175) claim that, “if researchers are to understand and characterise collaborative creativity they need to examine the nature and significance of the inter-actions, relationships and cultures which constitute and sustain such activity”. In order to capture such complexities, the data analysed for this article included: ten two-hour workshop sessions (video data and observations), two performances/gigs (video data and observations), one focus group interview with the participants and six individual participant logs.

Akin to Miell and Littleton (2008) in their study of teenage band rehearsals, the video data provided a means to capture collaborative music making where, “valuable opportunities for collaborative learning and working are fortuitous, serendipitous and improvised” (2008, p. 47). A free-standing video recorder was used to enable observational field notes to be taken simultaneously, thus addressing the one angle limitation of the video-recording. The dialogue from the workshop rehearsal session videos were transcribed verbatim and the observational field notes were then added to the transcriptions. An analysis of talk as well as non-verbal joint musical activity from the video data endeavoured to capture the complexities of both musical and social interactions.

In order to gain individual perspectives, participant logs were kept by six members of the ensemble over the fieldwork period. The logs intended to provide rich insights and understandings into members’ perceptions of their experiences within the ensemble as it unfolded over time. These logs were distributed, filled in and collected online using surveymonkey.³ Four log entries were prompted over nine months through a series of guiding

questions on issues including: motivation, role, performance, creativity and types of learning encountered. Thus, the logs were semi-structured but with opportunities for self-directed discussion and reflection.

A focus group interview capitalised on group dynamics amongst five members where participants had the potential to “spark off one another” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 140). The interview was carried out on-site during the latter half of the nine-month fieldwork phase to allow for preliminary themes to be explored as well as gaining trust within the ensemble for members to participate. The interview complemented the other forms of data very well to further understand collaborative creativity within the group and provided increased triangulation opportunities in the data gathered and analysed.

I took a participant–observer role in the study and so was cognisant of remaining reflexive through: theory and data triangulation, choice of methods, member checks and peer review. Ethical clearance was granted with confidentiality and anonymity maintained through the use of alias names for analysis and write up. Access with all participants and ‘gatekeepers’ was negotiated, with participants’ right to withdraw from the research at any time emphasised. Member checks and respondent verification were carried out on interview transcripts and analysis write-ups to provide important feedback to the interpretive process. In this manner, the research sought to produce a “recognisable reality” (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seddon, 2005) of the jazz ensemble.

Due to the socio-cultural theoretical perspectives and constructionist position underpinning the study, a thematic analysis shaped by such views was utilised in the data analysis. A three-phase analysis was carried out whereby all of the textual as well as video data were firstly open-coded through an ‘immersion approach’ which was mainly interpretive and fluid (Robson, 2002, p. 458). This first phase allowed for inductive themes to emerge through

initial thoughts and reflections across the varied data sets. Phase two entailed a ‘template approach’ (Robson, 2002, p. 458) to the original data analysis. This thematic approach was shaped by the socio-cultural theoretical perspectives presented in section one. The third phase sought out significant characteristics, incidents or actors within the data analysis. This three-phase holistic analysis across all data sources served to illuminate relationships, themes and issues and related these to the larger theoretical framework and focus of the study. The use of the qualitative software package NVivo was employed in this process.

3. Discussion of findings

Collaborative creativity emerged as a distinctive feature of the ensemble’s culture and practices within this research. Three significant themes emerged from the data analysis which were key to the ensemble’s creativity practices. These were: privileging improvisation, maintaining challenge, and building knowledge through leadership and collaboration. These practices often occurred simultaneously, were overlapping and relied on interplay between musical and social processes. Thus, the themes are woven into this discussion of findings holistically in order to capture the essence of the ensemble’s modus operandi.

There are certain ‘conventions’ or ‘rules’ (Becker, 2008; Berliner, 1994; Sawyer, 2003b, 2006a) attached to improvising in jazz. The ‘rules’ of improvisation were learned within this ensemble through practice, both musical and social. There was a sense of induction into a ‘world of jazz’ with all its traditions, values, stories, jokes and jargon. Jimmy as the tutor of the jazz ensemble, with both a national and international standing as a jazz performer, was seen as the ‘expert’ in the domain and so took on the role of inducting the other members. For instance, he frequently communicated stories or ‘jazz lore’ during the rehearsal sessions and often used such ‘lore’ as learning tools in themselves. For example, in the extract below,

Jimmy in trying to impart values about improvisation referred to ‘jazz legend’ Miles Davis during a rehearsal:

Jimmy: That’s why Miles Davis was such a great guy because he just didn’t give a shit, like he just did exactly what he wanted whenever he wanted. . . I mean he could of have just played those ballads that he did in the 50s until he died. . . someone said to him once, ‘why don’t you play that stuff anymore?’ He said, ‘I thought we got it right the first time’. (LJW video 9, 12/4/11)

In this extract, we see clearly Jimmy challenging members to be more experimental and creative in their approaches to playing jazz music. The use of a joke also imparted a certain reverence for Miles Davis’ love of trying new ways of playing jazz, but also imparted values in jazz music of not giving into seemingly ‘popular’ tastes. The quip from Miles Davis ‘I thought we got it right the first time’, was told by Jimmy for the purpose of humour but far greater than that, as a tool for learning about the culture of jazz and tradition of challenging, creative playing.

There were also diverse and overlapping memberships within the ensemble, which Moran and John-Steiner (2004, p. 12) argue is a key characteristic to gaining ‘complementarity’ in collaborations. Diversity of gender, musical background, race, roles of instrumentalist/singer as well as professional/amateur were all-important here. The following excerpt follows on from a period of 15 min where Leona was working as a solo-singer with the ensemble on ‘Born to be Blue’ during rehearsal. The time before this extract of dialogue was spent singing and re-singing sections under Jimmy’s advice to experiment more. Leona was open to these approaches but was clearly emotionally tired from the critique. The other members having been silent during this exchange appear to instinctively join in the conversation in the extract to both lighten the mood and provide mutual support:

Jimmy: I don’t think you are being challenged at all doing it that way. It sounds very comfortable for you to do it.

Eric: And that wouldn’t do at all (laughs)

Jack: (laughing) Come on, we are all under pressure here (waving his vibes beater at Leona) you've gotta' be under pressure with us.

Leona: A few sleepless nights ahead so (laughs)

Jimmy: No, I'm talking in the ideal situation try this, you don't have to try this in the gig but ultimately you should be kinda' thinking like that, to try stuff like that in a gig but here, let's try it again. Try a solo section, leave out the backgrounds for the minute and try to improvise on the words.

Leona: I need to see the words (reaches for folder)

Eric: Just one other thing came to mind, just to break it up a little bit, is we could maybe loop the four bars of the introduction in the middle, 'cause there is a lot of space there. . .

Jimmy: The second four?

Eric: Yeah the bah, bah (sings the sequence).

Jimmy: Okay, sure yeah.

(LJW Video 2, 23/11/10)

There was a great sense of camaraderie to be felt here that permeated through all of the sessions. Jack's comment "you've gotta' be under pressure with us" illustrated a togetherness with the singers that sometimes was not as visually apparent as it was between the players on their own. By verbally stating this joint membership, this sense of community and collaboration appeared as a reassurance to the singer. Furthermore, Eric in suggesting an approach to Leona indicated a creative collaborative effort and a feeling of 'we are in this together'.

As well as collaborative efforts, all of the members strongly attributed their output of creativity to Jimmy's encouragement. The following short exchange demonstrates one such example in practice:

Jimmy: ...maybe something different 'cause I mean no offence like but...

Beatrice: ...no offence like but? (All laugh)

Jimmy: ...but I mean 'Love me or Leave me' as a Bossa Nova...

Beatrice: ...yeah, yeah I know...it's really boring.

Jimmy: You could do it in your sleep.

(LJW video 4, 30/11/10)

Here all members share in the fun of Jimmy looking to challenge them further. There is a sense of shared history here; this type of exchange is familiar territory for the ensemble. In this manner collaborative creativity was expected, negotiated, based on mutual understandings and participation. The notion of creativity within the jazz ensemble was caught up with the notion of innovation (and particularly innovation through improvisation), which was unsurprising lying within the jazz genre. Enda commented on how this was a new departure for him coming from a different music back-ground:

...what I find about jazz exhilarating and frightening at the same time is the fact that when I go on stage playing folk music the pressure might be just to do with the crowds...you know exactly what you're going to do, what you're going to play and how it's going to work out (sounds of agreement from participants). The question in jazz is you don't know exactly what you are at (laughter), you don't work out solos, I haven't it pre-prepared. . .you just start and just hope that it that it works out (laughter) and it generally does. . .and it works out better than you even imagined it would work. . .at this stage in my life when I play folk music, I'm generally within my comfort zone you know because I've been at it for so long but this is a whole new experience for me (Enda, FG interview, 15/4/11).

All of the ensemble members noted the link between creativity and jazz improvisation practiced within the group. It was seen as a vital part of their creative practice with the overall consensus that Jimmy facilitated them all to leave their 'comfort zones'. The following quotations from the participant log (PL) entries outline such views of creativity within the jazz ensemble:

Emphasis is on being creative as a core component of playing jazz – plus Jimmy pushes you by use of free jazz – getting us to move beyond playing what is obvious (Ryan, PL4).

...the material we play is always challenging and meeting that challenge makes creativity unavoidable. There's no feeling of playing within the comfort zone and of course we are improvising a lot (Eric, PL4). In the band we are always encouraged to come up not only with less traditional songs, but also with ideas for improvisation and arrangements. I find this very, very challenging. I am not naturally a creative person and (especially at the beginning) I struggled with the idea of changing things around and daring a little. I am more comfortable with it now, but it's still a lot of work (Leona, PL4).

Here, ‘challenge’ had a strong association with creativity for the members. Although for most within the ensemble this was a hobby, the heavy workload of playing with the ensemble was significant but also viewed as necessary in order to achieve creative playing.

All members were very aware of the demands and challenges of achieving creativity. This challenge was also viewed as a main reason to remain a member of the ensemble and key to their enjoyment within it. Leona commented at interview, “...it makes you try different things...which is good because that’s why I think the class has stayed together so long, because there has been no time to let it go stale” (Leona, FG interview, 15/4/11). The members also noted the enjoyment of challenge and opportunity for creativity that the ensemble provided particularly through Jimmy’s leadership. This emphasis on creative practice appeared to sustain the ensemble’s membership. Challenge or as Jack claimed, making them; “up our game a few notches” was significantly linked with log entries regarding enjoyment. Reaching a “high standard” (Eric, PL1), through hard work was important for the members here to play in live gigs.

Just as ‘jazz lore’ was used as a learning tool, Jimmy again used it as a mechanism to promote creativity in playing. The following extract from a rehearsal session sees a direct effect of this where almost in a ‘motivational speech’ style the members of the ensemble respond in new musically creative ways in their improvisations:

The instrumentalists play through ‘Thousand Island Park’ together; Jimmy is now encouraging them to approach it in new ways.

Jimmy: ...I remember an interview with Keith Jarrett once where he said when he was really practicing very hard when he was young he saw his brother sit down at the piano and his brother couldn’t play a note on the piano but he said he just sat at the piano for half an hour and he just listened to him and he said he played more music in that half an hour than Keith Jarrett in all his sixteen hour a day practice sessions...the scales are just a guideline really...they’re not set in stone, it really is an opportunity to play stuff that’s not what you normally play you know...it’s all about trying to find something new in what you do, something unexpected or something that’s not set like with some sort of conformity. There are no rules with this stuff...ok can we try it again so – just the last note on the first thing is Enda(starts playing bass guitar as a lead in) and...

Enda on flute plays an improvisation with Brian on drums. It is much more experimental and free than before, with the drums in particular making broad use of all of the sounds on the drum kit. At one point, Brian swishes his brush sticks in the air to make subtle sounds, Jimmy looks over and they both quietly laugh together at the

gesture. Jimmy then gets Eric and Brian to solo together and once again the improvisation is much more experimental than previously played. Finally Jack on vibes begins and improvises with drums. Here the improvisation reaches a new level for approximately two minutes where the vibes and drums appear to be immersed in a conversation. The atmosphere is intense and respectful, Brian watches Jack a lot during this but Jack never looks up from the vibes.

(LJW video 3, 23/11/10)

In particular the vibes and drums here approached the improvisation ‘in the moment’, engaging in “spontaneous musical utterances” (Davidson & Good, 2002) like a common language. This high level of “musical communication” (Seddon & Biasutti, 2009) that was achieved may be attributed to the fact that these two players had a shared history together where they were both drummers and Jack tutored Brian on percussion in the past. This might also explain why Brian watched Jack during the improvisation but Jack did not look up. In the actual performance some weeks later, this improvisation duet between drums and vibes was different in what notes were played but that same feeling of immersion that was present in rehearsal was present again.

The immersive feeling of improvisatory performance was often commented on within the participant logs with the members appearing to reach points of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) quite easily when playing together. Leona clearly reflects this when she noted the spontaneity of jazz improvisation as aiding this feeling, “when things do work though, it’s brilliant and you sometimes forget you are on stage” (Leona, PL3). The experience of performance was related in all log entries as different to the rehearsal sessions. This, it was recounted, manifested itself through the nervousness of playing in front of an audience but also primarily as a feeling of being absorbed in the playing. Ryan wrote (Ryan, PL3), “There is a feeling of being immersed in the music and the moment – all focus is in the now – observing and experiencing being part of the music being made”.

This ‘peak experience’ resonated deeply with the idea of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sawyer, 2003b, 2006a). An immersive feeling in performance was also evident in the video

data of performances and in particular the final performance where long improvisatory passages were engaged in consistently as part of their creative practices, demonstrated from the video data example below:

The ensemble plays ‘Dr Jackle’ as their finishing piece in the final performance for the LJW term. It is instrumental only and a guest player from another ensemble joins them on soprano saxophone. The players improvise at length and freely during the playing. The audience are very responsive to the experimentation, cheering loudly each time the playing becomes more experimental. (LJW video performance 2, 24/5/11)

The players performing ‘Dr Jackle’ took on the norms of a jazz jamming session where they improvised at length sometimes up to 4 min. The other players turned physically to appreciate these in turn and follow each other’s non-verbal gestures to come in each time with the tune. Two of the players, Jack and Jimmy, appeared most comfortable with this loose style of performance, reflecting their identities as professional musicians in the group and length of time playing together (25 years in various musical groups), truly enjoying the freedom of playing. This was most apparent when they performed a duet on bass guitar and drums at one point in the tune.

While the other members appeared to enjoy their improvisations too, they seemed more hesitant, particularly at entry points in the music, not always trusting themselves to the same levels as the more experienced players. This correlated with findings of other studies (Berliner, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sawyer, 2003b, 2006b; Seddon & Biasutti, 2009; Seddon, 2005) where the more experienced and familiar players are the deeper the domain of ‘knowledge’ is, the greater levels of musical interaction, communication and creativity can take place.

Within the performances this “group flow state” (Sawyer, 2003b) was evidenced through the players: musical responses to each other, the seamless nature of passing on solos, non-verbal gestures to attend to conventions, peer approval through behaviour such as bowing their

heads, nodding and occasional smiles, and audience approval as the group became more experimental. In this way the group appeared to be “empathetically attuned” to each other (Seddon, 2005) and an “interactional synchrony of the performers” (Sawyer, 2003b, p. 13) was obviously present. The positive audience reaction to improvisational playing in performance also reflected the important role they play within a ‘systems model of creativity’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) to validate creative playing. The audience, as avid jazz concert-goers in Limerick city, formed a crucial part of this field of experts during public performances.

As well as this, the experience of playing collaboratively highly impacted on members’ sense of enjoyment as an ensemble. This echoed with what Sawyer describes as a “collaborative emergence” where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (2003b, p. 12). The members in their logs and at interview noted the aspects of strong leadership, group membership, challenging playing and priority given to creative learning within the ensemble as individual and collective reasons for its success. Leona summed up these elements quite well stating:

. . . I was really pleased [referring to a performance] not just because it was a good song and we played it well but because it pushed me to do the best that I could possibly do and it was very nice that your teacher kind of did everything around you to lead you to that. . . I was with other bands before and it was fine to play standards and sing standards. . . but the terror of learning these things and you know the sleepless nights trying to get it. . . I feel I’ve come such a long way that it’s worth the effort you know and I don’t know if I’d go back to something that is nice but it doesn’t quite push you (Leona, FG interview, 15/4/11).

4. Conclusion

This case study within a socio-cultural theory of learning provided a ‘situated’, ‘real world’ example of how musical groups can build, acquire, share, and situate creativity through collaborative processes. In response to a call to “further our understanding of collaborations as important sites for creativity” (Littleton et al., 2008, p. 175), the findings presented interesting perspectives on how collaborative creativity might be promoted within educational contexts, specifically within music teaching and learning. The shared distinctive

creativity practices found within the ensemble could be summarised as: privileging improvisation in performance, maintaining challenges in playing and building knowledge through leadership and collaboration. These practices were both formal and informal in approach, and involved a balance between musical and social processes.

The jazz domain or music-making of the ensemble carried genre-specific conventions, norms, values and traditions. The tutor stood as the ‘expert’ in the domain of jazz and so facilitated induction into this ‘jazz world’ through discourse within musical and social processes. This enculturation and immersive approach to teaching and learning significantly aided the collaborative creativity practices of this group. The role of leadership to consistently challenge the group and provide opportunities to engage in creative practices was especially important to the jazz ensemble. Fundamental to this leadership however was an approach that was collaborative; where practices were negotiated and sustained through the group. The importance of promoting participatory group learning opportunities as an ever-evolving collaborative creative process was continually highlighted throughout the data findings.

The performance practices of the ensemble provided significant insights into collaborative creativity. The ensemble relied on what Seddon and Biasutti (2009) describe as ‘musical communication’ where members learned and negotiated the ‘rules’ implicitly and explicitly through participatory performance. This was seen very clearly where the improvisatory sections of the performances encapsulated a certain ‘etiquette’ whereby while the improvisations were ‘spontaneous’, they also abided by ‘rules’ such as keeping to the tempo and playing for a certain number of bars. The members recounted feelings of ‘flow’, ‘togetherness’ and belonging’ that participatory performance gave to them. This all occurred through musical communication between the members within rehearsals and performances, where responses were ‘in the moment’ but built up through a shared history of playing together in collaborative ways. The members therefore were learning through creative

collaboration in their “social world” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and “art world” (Becker, 2008), reflecting the musical and social practices of this community.

This research was based in a community setting with adults, within one musical genre. However, the implications of the research reach beyond this in seeking to understand and problematise how learning environments, institutions and communities might potentially facilitate collaborative creative endeavours. Firstly, the provision for multiple and varied ‘spaces’ for collaborative creativity opportunities would broaden inclusion opportunities. The ensemble studied placed a high value on socio-musical relationships and interactions. Time is particularly required for such relationships to be built up. Furthermore, challenge and learning as an endeavour of knowledge building, sharing, and negotiation emerged as important to the members for sustained participation but also creative playing. Therefore a balance between social and musical interactions where challenge and learning are valued as core components of participation should play a significant role in fostering collaborative creativity.

Collaborative creativity emerged as an important and defining feature of this jazz ensembles’ modus operandi. Their creative practices were dependent on strong leadership but also collaborative effort where built-knowledge and a history of experiences led to increased improvisation and experimentation in rehearsal and performance. Therefore, the ensembles’ emphases on collaborative creativity and shared learning, through their musical and social practices, were mutually reinforcing. This research then offers insights and possibilities, rooted in one ensemble’s practices, for opening up the many ways of collaborative creativity in group music-making.

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