

**Beyond Lucy Green:
Operationalizing Theories of Informal Music Learning
Panel Presentation, AERA Conference 2008, New York, NY**

Response to Panel

By

Lucy Green

I would like to thank the editors for this opportunity to respond to the articles presented in the American Educational Research Association symposium “Beyond Lucy Green” earlier this year, published in *VRME* Vol. 12. I also wish to express my appreciation and thanks to those panel members who chose to make close examinations of my work. Inevitably a range of issues will arise in any forum such as this. Overall I agree wholeheartedly with the spirit of the debate and the points that were raised by all five writers. No doubt if the six of us were sitting around a table, we could go on talking about these things all day and all night.

Before responding, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the title of the symposium, which was released in 2007, was presumably conceived with reference to my book *How Popular Musicians Learn*, which was published in 2001. The intention of the symposium, as expressed in its Abstract, was to:

... go beyond Lucy Green’s descriptive ethnographies of informal music learning to inform practice in music teacher education that is theoretically grounded.

Indeed, in the final chapter of *How Popular Musicians Learn*, I put forward a number of suggestions for possible ways in which music educators might incorporate informal learning practices into formal education. After the symposium Abstract was released, my more recent book, *Music, Informal Learning and the School* was published in 2008; and this book is itself my own response to going beyond that earlier work! However the authors in the panel have understandably addressed mainly this latter book rather than the one before it.

Next, as briefly as possible, I would like to respond to two main areas that arose in the panel members' discussions. My aim is to clarify how and why I am in agreement with the authors, and to attempt to set to rights any points of misunderstanding that may have occurred.

The “disappearance of the teacher”

The first area is one that I regard as particularly important. Some of the authors suggest that the learning strategies I have developed involve what Randall Allsup in his Abstract refers to as “the disappearance of the teacher”. He also asks:

In Green's curriculum, where professional educators are prohibited from setting explicit educational targets and learning objects, even a friendly critic is left wondering just how a music educator is trained in informalist teaching, to what uses are put a teacher's content expertise, and the degree to which an acquaintance with instructional theory is even necessary (4-5).

This leads him to suggest that the “music teachers in Green's new book could easily be outsourced in favour of cheaper, less experienced, and under-educated labor” (5).

Both he and Ann Clements put forward a view of how a music teacher should be. For example:

I am convinced that the teachers best capable of managing such a task will be those music educators with a practiced democratic outlook (Allsup, 8).

While Green takes a very strong approach to the role of teacher – or the lack of the role of teacher, I would like to suggest that music teachers play a role that is more similar to facilitator and “sharer” in the learning process ... While I fully support student centered learning, I can't help but have great faith in the intuitiveness, creativity, and ability level of music educators (Clements, 7).

They suggest, quite rightly, that “a sound educational framework must be in place should teachers and teacher educators wish to ‘operationalize’ the practices of popular musicians” (Allsup, Abstract).

All this I thoroughly agree with. I would like to clarify my position in the simplest way possible, by direct citations from *Music, Informal Learning and the School*. For I cannot emphasise enough how important is the role of the teacher in the project that is described and analysed there.

It is quite true that, as Clements quotes, during each of the seven stages of the curriculum teachers were asked to “establish ground rules for behaviour, set the task going at each stage, and then stand back and observe what the pupils were doing” (Green 2008, 24, cited by Clements, 5). But this is by no means the end of it – indeed, this is what teachers were asked to do for the first two or three lessons only (see pp. 31, 34 and elsewhere). The passage continues:

During this time teachers were asked to attempt to take on and empathise with pupils’ perspectives and the goals that pupils set for themselves, then to begin to diagnose pupils’ needs in relation to those goals. After, and only after, this period, they were to offer suggestions and act as “musical models” through demonstration, so as to help pupils reach the goals that they had set for themselves (Green 2008, 24).

Below is a lengthy quote from one section of the book, where the teachers’ roles at the beginning of Stage 1 of the project are discussed, in terms so commensurate with those espoused by Allsup and Clements, as well as other panel members, that I hope it becomes clear we are all fundamentally in agreement on this point:

Pupils were of course free to ask for help at any point during the project, and had been told that teachers were available to offer help. However it was not until pupils started trying to play instruments, and particularly, to match pitches on instruments with those on their chosen recording, that they began to seek, or to really need, help. At that point, sometimes in response to a request, and sometimes not, teachers began to offer some guidance in the form of suggestions and minimal demonstration, or what we referred to as ‘modelling’.

This approach was different from the usual instructional role, partly because it was based on the diagnosis of and response to learner-perceived, immediate need, rather than on pre-established teacher-set aims or objectives with long-term trajectories in mind. It involved teaching in a responsive, rather than directive way; metaphorically taking the learner by the hand, getting inside their head and asking ‘What do they want to achieve now, this minute, and what is the main thing they need to achieve it?’. In this way, the teacher sits alongside the learner and is to a large extent a learner themselves. As Yasmin [Head of Music] described the role: ‘I’m learning to stand back I suppose, and I suppose it’s teaching in a non-teacher-like way’.

One result was that teachers found themselves questioning pupils in a different way:

-Sandra [Head of Music]: What I’ve been able to do is to go into groups, ask them questions, and then actually wait for them to come back with the answers themselves, rather than me having any particular in-put. ... I was in a group last week, went in, ‘How did you get on today?’ and they said ‘Oh it wasn’t very good’. So I was able just to say to them ‘What, why wasn’t it very good?’ And they told me exactly why, and then looked for the next question. So I said ‘What will you do about it?’ And they came up with two almost, you know, perfect suggestions of things to try, and they’ve then tried it. And I think the effect that has on them is that they have found the way themselves, they know they’ve found the way themselves, and today they’ve done a performance which demonstrates how effective that’s been, and that they can put together a piece of music from, from nothing. ... So I was questioning them in a completely different way, I wasn’t leading them in any respect, I was just giving them the opportunity to speak out. It’s a completely different way of questioning from when *you’ve* got the answer in your head, you want them to say the word ‘dynamics’ and you’re going to get them to say the word ‘dynamics’ for as long as it takes you to do it. It’s different – it doesn’t matter.¹

Some ways in which teachers provided help, and which we all felt worked well, included: showing pupils how to play something but only in

rough, simplified or partial form, then retreating; showing them how to hold an instrument more comfortably but without insisting on correct hold or posture; showing them where to find notes on an instrument but without saying exactly what to do with those notes; playing a riff or a rhythm but without expecting accurate repetition, (as often the learner would be able to repeat, for example, pitch contour but not the exact pitches); going along with pupils' choices, so that if a pupil wanted to play something on a glockenspiel, which would be much easier on an electric keyboard, the teacher would avoid insisting on switching to the easier instrument, since (as we will see) the choice of instrumental sound is often vital to the learner's motivation. In general teachers avoided standing over pupils to check that they were doing what they had been shown correctly, but instead left them to take the advice in their own way, or not to take it at all. A little help without seeking perfection gave a lease for further development by the pupils themselves, and enabled pupils to retain ownership over their musical products and strategies.

On some occasions pupils would take what had been shown, and change it in some way for the better. This could occur particularly since pupils were often more encultured in the relevant style than the teachers. Thus they knew what was more outstanding or distinctive about the aspect of the song they were copying, whereas those who are not encultured may tend to reduce the essential qualities down to a norm. For example:

-Connor: Well I asked Mr X to do it, and he showed me. He just went (plays beat), but I thought 'Nah that don't sound like the beat', so I thought (plays beat, actually more accurate than the one Mr. X had shown him).

In addition, not all the teachers were accustomed to copying music by ear; and they did not have proficiency on every instrument that the pupils chose to use. Their roles involved to a large extent, becoming learners alongside their pupils.

Teachers also worked with *group* inter-relationships by, for example, suggesting that one person with a strong sense of rhythm should play an open bar and others should then concentrate on listening to that person during the ensemble. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, the groups were composed of pupils with mixed ability and mixed prior musical experiences. Whilst it was part of

the strategy for teachers to encourage certain pupils to help others, as will be seen, many pupils rose to take such roles upon themselves, and furthermore, they were not always ones who had been expected to do so.

Overall, the main approach was to help pupils, firstly through observing their actions and diagnosing their needs, then demonstrating, or modelling, in order to foster learning by watching, listening and imitation, rather than explaining, naming, or insisting. (Green 2008, 34-5)

The text then takes a briefer look at how teachers became even more in demand during Stage 2 of the project, and goes onwards to the other stages.

In order to enact the approaches described above, the teachers needed a great deal of skill and experience, both as educators and as musicians, in ways that I think are entirely commensurate with the visions of how teachers should be, suggested by the panel members. For example, Clements' concept of the teacher as "facilitator and 'sharer'", and her "faith in the intuitiveness, creativity, and ability level of music educators" are very much echoed here. Also, with the exception of two beginner-teachers who took part in the project under the support of their Heads of Department, all the teachers studied in the book were experienced and highly skilled, and most of them were Heads of Music. I would in fact not recommend beginner teachers to attempt the strategies on their own. As well as organisational skills, the ability to build constructive relationships with children, and general pedagogic skills, the teachers needed subject-knowledge and subject-specific skills, such as: having a working knowledge, and being able to handle a range of instruments, including the bass guitar, electric guitar, drum-kit, keyboards and any orchestral instruments that pupils brought into class; being able to demonstrate how to play basic musical phrases on them; being able to aurally copy music from a recording of any kind of music the students brought in, as well as from the provided curriculum materials; being able to suggest how pupils can improve their instrumental skills, ensemble skills, compositional and improvisational skills; being able to link the informal strategies to the school's formal curriculum; and much more.

Also, there is no question of "prohibiting" teachers from setting explicit goals. Rather the goals are spread over a number of lessons. As I say on page 25 (with italics added here):

Teachers were able to relate the work to overall teaching and learning policies within their schools (see Green with Walmsley 2006). However, they did not set targets and objectives for every lesson. Rather the generic aim of listening to a song and copying it [in Stages 1 to 3] was an *ongoing objective* that stretched over a number of lessons. Some lessons ended with class performances and discussions, which replicated informal learning practices in the sense that peer-assessment, listening to and watching each other are central parts of such learning (Green 2008, 25).

Not only did the teachers work with pupils as “diagnosers”, guides and musical models throughout the project, but the curriculum itself was structured into seven stages. These involved both popular and classical music, and not only listening and copying exercises, but ensemble, performance, composition and improvisational skills. In four of the seven stages, curriculum materials were provided, which included popular and classical music selected, not by the pupils themselves but by myself or the teaching team. In two of the stages the materials were broken down into formats which I devised, versions of which can be devised by any teacher to suit their own context and their pupils’ needs.

Tending towards prescription and narrowness

The second issue that I would like to clarify relates to the anxiety that the curriculum was prescriptive and may lead to narrowness. For research purposes it was indeed necessary to request teachers to take a common approach, otherwise it would not have been possible to draw overall conclusions. As Clements kindly noted, the bridge between theory and practice was one that I was attempting to cross. But of course, any teacher who wishes to use the approach or the materials – they are out there on the internet, freely available thanks to generosity of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation – is able to do so. The idea is that teachers who wish to use them, will adapt the materials to their own contexts. As I say in the final chapter of the book:

Thus an ideal situation could involve an integration of informal learning with more formal approaches, which is exactly what the teachers in the project

went on to develop. Yasmin [Head of Music] described the way her school approached this:

-Yasmin: ... it would never be: 'This is a Musical Futures lesson, this is going to be a formal lesson'. We would want to incorporate all of this sort of thing into every lesson, but also bring back some of the more formal basic theory skills. Just so that it works alongside.

Her school developed what is known in the UK as a Scheme of Work, in which the first five project stages were complemented by more formal approaches in half-term blocks across the academic year. In Richard's school the project stages were alternated with blocks of lessons in the ICT music room. In Sandra's school, aspects and stages of the project were infused into the curriculum for all year groups, including the use of informal learning practices with classical music, Latin American music, film music and others. (Green 2008, 182)

A final very important issue, is that whereas the conference panel was interested in relating this work to teacher education – a vital undertaking – this was not, however, my concern in *Music, Informal Learning and the School*, whose aim was mainly to consider learning and teaching in the school situation. Indeed there is, as the writers say, much work to be done in this exciting area in relation to teacher education as well as music education across a range of contexts. Once again I would like to thank the panellists for their thoughts, and I look forward to continuing to work together in these times of change and challenge for music education.

References

- Allsup, R. 2008. Creating an educational framework for popular music in public schools: anticipating the second wave. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 12.
- Clements, A. 2008. Escaping the classical canon: changing methods through a change of paradigm. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 12.
- Edwards, G. , and A. V. Kelly, eds. 1998. *Experience and Education: Towards an Alternative National Curriculum*. London: Routledge.

Green, Lucy. 2002. *How Popular Musicians Learn* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers.

———. 2008. *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*. Aldershot: Ashgate Press.

Green, Lucy, and Abigail Walmsley. *Classroom Resources for Informal Music Learning at Key Stage 3*. www.musicalfutures.org/PractitionersResources.html Section 2; Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2006 [cited. Available from www.musicalfutures.org].

Wiggins, Jackie. 2008. When the music is theirs: scaffolding young songwriters. In *A cultural psychology for music education*, edited by M. Barrett. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ⁱ Footnote 1 at this point says: Interestingly, Sandra's approach here is commensurate with what is recommended by Edwards and Mercer (1987) in their discussion of the use of language in the classroom. It also has much in common with the Brunerian concept of 'scaffolding'. For a discussion and practical analysis of this concept within a music classroom see J. Wiggins (forthcoming) [2008].]