



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Exploring Processes of Inclusion and Creativity in Music Education Showcases in Schools

A research project funded
by the Creative Ireland programme

Regina Murphy and Claire Shortall
School of Arts Education and Movement
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November 2023



Curiosity as restless questioning, as movement toward the revelation of something hidden, as a question verbalised or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance, constitutes an integral part of the phenomenon of being alive. There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of our own making.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998)

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to convey their sincere thanks to the following without whose participation and support this study would not have been possible:

- John Mardirosian, Waltons Music School, whose vision, commitment and sensitivity to children and young people's music educational lives inspired this study
- The many pupils, students, teachers and principals in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland who participated in the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition, together with the adjudicators
- The National Concert Hall
- RTÉ lyric fm
- The Royal Irish Academy of Music
- Dr Mairéad Berrill, Independent Academic Consultant
- DCU Research Ethics Committee
- DCU Research Support Office
- DCU Communications and Marketing

The authors also wish to acknowledge the Creative Ireland Programme in particular, without whose support this research would not have been possible.

Suggested citation:

Murphy, R. & Shortall, C. (2023). *Exploring processes of inclusion and creativity in music education showcases in schools [EPIC_MUSS]: A research project funded by the Creative Ireland programme*. Dublin, Ireland.

Abbreviations and Terms

List of abbreviations

DE	Department of Education in Ireland
TY	Transition Year
NQT	Newly qualified teacher

List of terms


the Competition	Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition
Pupils	Children attending primary schools in Ireland, typically aged from 4-12 years
Students	Young people attending post-primary schools in Ireland, typically aged from 12-18 years
Transition Year	A non-state examined Year 4 at post-primary level, offered by many schools following Junior Cycle, and before students commence the formal Senior Cycle programme.
Junior classes	Classes at primary level for children aged 4/5 to aged 8/9
Senior classes	Classes at primary level for children aged 8/9 to aged 12/13

Executive Summary

This research project titled: *Exploring Processes of Inclusion and Creativity in Music Education Showcases in Schools* (EPIC_MUSS), set out to explore musical creativity in a sample of primary and post-primary schools from across a wide geographical area in Ireland. Specifically, the study sought to explore the processes of creative and inclusive music making that lay behind the schools' previous participation in a non-profit, performance music competition, titled the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition. At European level, creativity has been regarded as an underexploited resource, largely characterised by fragmentation of initiatives (UNESCO, 2019). However, as an all-of-government strategy, the Creative Ireland programme (2017-2022) has sought to connect cultural and creative practices across various sectors to enable access to, and participation in, creativity for all. Theoretical perspectives in the study focused on the nature of school music and representations of musicality in group music making. Research literature also explored collaborative, musical creativity in school contexts, as well as the role of competitions in music making, such as band or choral events. A focus on inclusion and inclusive contexts for music making was also examined.

As part of the entry process to the Competition, the schools crafted video recordings of their creative musical endeavours and following a preliminary round, twelve groups, representing schools nationwide, were selected to perform at a finalists' showcase event in the National Concert Hall. These schools were visited and studied to uncover their creative and inclusive processes. The Competition's assessment criteria ((i) musicality; (ii) creativity; (iii) collaboration, and (iv) inclusiveness also served as a framework for interpretation, to deconstruct its salient features and to consider how such elements might be foregrounded through participation. The schools' interpretations of these concepts and subsequent representations through music were also explored. Using collective case study design (Stake, 2012; Yin 2018), qualitative methodology was employed to frame understandings of participants' experiences in individual sites, as well as in cross-case comparisons. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) guided the distillation of insights, drawing from experiences encountered in each of the individual cases, and these were also synthesised in a cross-case analysis of themes. The features of the Competition's assessment criteria were also employed heuristically to frame understandings of the experiences of all participants and glean unique insights.

Through visiting each of the case study sites, conducting interviews with children in primary schools, students in postprimary schools, classroom teachers, music teachers and principals, the study found that the experience of participation is a dynamic, collaborative and inclusive learning process for pupils, students and their teachers. Cultivating a strong identity as a school, reflecting its unique social and cultural contexts, and generating individual stories of growth through the



experience, were strong themes in each school's accounts of the process. Significantly, the musical strengths and unique of identities fused to create a wide range of social, cultural, creative and musical learning experiences that reached far beyond the short stage performance. While competitiveness can have negative connotations, in this instance, the music Competition inspired a unique type of creative and collaborative music making, heightening the experience of school as a community of music makers for all participants in varying, positive ways.

Key issues

- The distinctive features of the Competition, especially its theme, sparked creative collaboration across class levels, and between staff and students in unique ways in each school, opening up a range of possibilities for creative exploration.
- The parameters of the Competition focused attention on aspects of musical communication, interpretation and style, that were adapted uniquely in each school and shaped according to young people's abilities, proclivities and experiences.
- The processes of the Competition created scope for inclusion, as well as recursive and creative learning experiences in both musical and extra-musical ways.
- The role of the National Concert Hall in providing space to perform in a national cultural venue motivated students' creative work, while the support from RTÉ lyric fm also represented a recognition and valuing of the children and young people's musical endeavours. For the schools, the impact of building towards the performances was formative, creative and generative—far beyond the experiences of any of the children and young people before, especially those located far from regional cultural centres.

Overall, the value of the Competition model was strongly evidenced through the research. The study finds that the experience of participation is a dynamic, collaborative and inclusive learning process for pupils, students and their teachers alike, where the musical strengths and unique of identities of the schools coalesce to create a wide range of social, cultural, creative and musical learnings that reach far beyond the short performance that is presented on stage. Finally, the study concludes with key insights that highlight the potential for learning from such musical performances and competitions. Recommendations for policy development are also outlined.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research story begins with a public showcase of short performances that focus on inclusive music making in school contexts. While each presentation is quite brief, lasting no more than five minutes, these public imaginative performances have intrigued the authors of this report for some years, knowing that what is presented on stage typically belies the depth of the musical processes and the breadth of learning that is experienced in its creation. In observing the short presentations of each artistic piece, the work has called for an exploration of the deeper meaning lying behind each mini showcases, and therefore an exploration of the context, processes and significance of each one was warranted. Thus, while it would appear that the young participants had simply risen to the stage to take part in a competition and presented some integrated musical ideas and 'storyline' to a team of expert adjudicators, there was a sense that the real story lay in understanding how the participating children and teenagers, together with their teachers and other members of their community, were drawn to the idea of creative and inclusive music making in the first instance, and how they each generated their musical presentation to communicate a powerful message to a spellbound audience.

Research objectives


According to the proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child"¹ and in this project we aim to understand the role of the "village", i.e., the school and its wider cultural community, in raising the children and young people in this research to be the best that they can be in maximising their creative potential.

The overall objectives of the study seek to uncover creative potential and pedagogies of inclusion in music making in a range of participating schools nationwide.

Specifically, the research asks:

- a) How can we understand the teaching and learning processes and potential that involve children and young people in creating a musical piece?


¹ The phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" originates from an African proverb and conveys the message that it takes many people ("the village") to provide a safe, healthy environment for children, where children are given the security they need to develop and flourish, and to be able to realise their hopes and dreams. This requires an environment where children's voices are taken seriously and where multiple people (the "villagers") including parents, siblings, extended family members, neighbours, teachers, professionals, community members and policy makers, care for a child. All these 'villagers' may provide direct care to the children and/or support the parent in looking after their children (Reupert et al., 2022, n.p.)

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- b) How is the interest in music making fostered among children and young people?
 - c) How is creativity defined and expressed in this context for all participants?
 - d) How are various individuals selected, included or excluded in the process?
 - e) How do these young music makers learn to collaborate and share ideas?
 - f) How might the learning from this process contribute to a roadmap for inclusive and creative musical participation in other schools, both small and large, rural and urban?
 - g) What are the implications for policy development?
 - h) How can this model be sustained more widely?

Music education has long been recognised as an integral feature of a well-rounded education at primary and post-primary levels. However, there has been a growing interest in the importance of creative music making specifically in schools. Many scholars and teachers in the field believe that creativity is a capacity that can be acquired through learning, teaching and practice (Amabile, 2012; Beghetto, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Selig. 2012; Robinson, 2001). Typically, creativity in music making involves the exploration and creation of new sounds, melodies and rhythms, often through improvisation and collaboration using a range of instruments or sound sources. It has been widely believed that this type of music making allows students to express themselves in a unique and personal way while developing their creativity both independently and collaboratively (see Burnard & Murphy, 2017).

Despite widespread beliefs in the child's capacity to be creative both from both a curriculum perspective (e.g., Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework; Primary School Curriculum, 1999) as well as from evidence in the research literature (e.g., Glăveanu, 2011), young people's creative capacities in music is often overlooked or undervalued. This is partly due to a lack of research on its efficacy and impact on students. Therefore, this research is crucial to providing evidence-based insights into the value of creative music making in schools.

A wide range of studies have shown that music education can improve social and emotional skills, cognitive abilities, such as spatial-temporal skills, and enhance academic performance in areas such as mathematics and reading, as well as bringing a wide range of other benefits (Hallam, 2015). Additionally, creative music making can promote teamwork and communication skills, which are essential for success in the modern workforce. Furthermore, creative music making has the potential to positively impact students' mental health and well-being. Research has demonstrated that music can reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, and even enhance immune function (Hallam & Hermonides, 2022). In the



context of schools, creative music making may provide a valuable outlet for students to cope with the pressures of academic and social demands.

In conclusion, creative music making has the potential to provide numerous benefits for students, including the development of creativity, critical thinking, social skills, and well-being. The current study provides one avenue for exploring and understanding the value of creative music making in schools and to provide evidence-based insights into its potential impact. Such research could inform the development of effective music education policies and practices, and ultimately benefit students in schools around the world.

Chapter 2: Setting the Scene


Forty students walk quietly onto the stage of the National Concert Hall and assume their places in a wide U-shape. Almost all are wearing their school uniforms: the girls in dark grey jumpers and long, gabardine skirts, the boys in similar jumpers, and grey trousers. But yet, there is diversity among the group, and at once, a sense of anticipation that a unique and original performance is about to start. To the side, and still somewhat obscured, are a couple of students fully attired in salsa dance costumes, while another dancer, dressed in a bright red silk saree with intricate gold embroidery, is just visible through the wall of gabardine skirts on the other side of the stage. Two students are holding a flag or banner of some kind, poised for its unfurling at a later point in the performance. Now a small girl sits at the grand piano, checking that her feet can fully reach the pedals, while two students strum noiselessly on electric guitars. Three other students are also imperceptibly adjusting the tuning on their violins. An evocative chordal progression is played on the piano, immediately heightening the sense of excitement and attunement in the audience. The auditorium falls silent as a young boy steps forward to sing solo in the centre of the stage... a story is about to begin.

This story begins at its point of culmination. Seated in the National Concert Hall, what we are about to observe is a music competition, involving groups from primary schools and post-primary schools in Ireland. As audience members in this scenario, we find ourselves instantly drawn to a performance event that has triggered high levels of situational interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006) among both performers and audience alike. Clearly, a competitive music performance is about to be presented by school-aged students in a very formal setting. Although we know that both band and choral competitions are highly motivating environments for students at school and college levels alike (Glasscock, 2021; Gouzouasis, & Henderson, 2012; O’Leary, 2016; Shah & Saidon, 2016; Stamer, 2004), the style of this competition spans both vocal and instrumental genres, as well as elements of other art forms, and therefore, the motivations behind what we are about to observe in this hybrid musical performance has yet to be revealed.

Contextualising the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition

To understand how the primary pupils and post-primary students have achieved the status of performing on the stage of a prestigious venue, we first explore the parameters of the competition that precede the performance.

According to the Competition’s website (newschool.ie/waltons-rte-lyric-fm-music-for-schools-competition), the Competition is a non-profit event that seeks to celebrate and support music making in Irish primary and post-primary schools in the first instance. Focusing on both musical and non-




musical benefits, the Competition fosters approaches to music making that are both creative and collaborative. It is open to all Department of Education registered primary and post-primary schools in Ireland, and to date has attracted entries from all 26 counties. Students who make it to the final are afforded the honour of performing in the very prestigious national venue that is the National Concert Hall (NCH).

Notwithstanding the sense of prestige and privilege associated with an event in such an illustrious venue as the NCH, there are several unique dimensions to the Competition's structure however that suggest a process that is both enabling and inclusive.

In the first instance, the entry comprises a 5-minute, live, musical presentation (without backing tracks) that can comprise vocal or instrumental music or a combination, in any genre(s) with a maximum of 40 pupils/students from the same school. The performers must convey the given theme that is put forward each year—usually one that expresses the breadth of musical possibilities inherent in music making e.g., “When Words Fail, Music Speaks” (Hans Christian Andersen), or “Music Has No Borders”. The schools then submit their entries online, together with (a) a video recording of the performance, and (b) a photograph of the group. The application form itself requires details of the school's context from a music teaching and learning perspective, i.e., whether music features as a curricular subject, or as whole class instrumental teaching, or as an extracurricular activity, or as a combination of approaches.

The announcement of the selected finalists (six primary groups and six post-primary) is broadcast nationally on the Irish classical-music and arts radio station, RTÉ lyric fm. In all, twelve schools are selected to participate in the finalists' concert in the National Concert Hall in the presence of two adjudicators who are prominent Irish musicians, composers and/or music educators. All other participating schools also receive an award certificate that is graded as “Commended” or “Highly Commended” and are strongly encouraged to consider entering again in the future.

The top prizes are generous and, in keeping with the educational focus of the initiative, comprise vouchers that can be used for the purchase of musical instruments and/or equipment for the winning schools from a designated musical instrument store. The total prize fund is €7,000 and is divided equally between primary and post-primary participants, with a voucher to the value of €2,000 awarded to first placed schools in each category. Similarly, a €1,000 voucher is awarded to each of the two second placed schools and a €500 voucher to the two schools placed third in each category. Although schools differ in size, there is a sense of equity in imagining the distribution of the prizes, and a desire that the instruments might reach the hands of young, committed music makers in each case, irrespective of age, size or geographical location of their school.




Several dimensions of the Competition's parameters immediately prompt a sense of creative endeavour on multiple levels. First, the given theme each year affords imaginative interpretations that span literal and subliminal meanings. Second, the Competition offers teachers and schools the opportunity to think and work both creatively and collaboratively with any combination of students in developing their original music project that has learning potential at every stage of the process. Third, collaboration is encouraged between and across students and teachers, suggesting the interweaving of perspectives, levels of expertise, musical taste and musical preferences. This process is likely to encourage moments of tension as musical challenges are encountered, as well as musical resolutions as the work is refined and presented, again underlining a creative trajectory for the work. The requirement for significant student input also suggests a strong participatory and democratic approach (Freire, 1970; Spruce & Woodward, 2015) in the music making which can provide space for fresh and divergent thinking, meaning-making and creative presentation through music.

Research on participation in arts and cultural activities

While there is little research on the particular integrated musical performances found in the Competition that are the focus of this study, largescale studies undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute of young people's participation in arts and cultural activities in Ireland at ages nine and 13 have revealed that earlier involvement in the arts is strongly predictive of participation at a later age (Smyth, 2020). The research has also found however, that by the time young people reach the age of 17, the decline in arts and cultural participation is significant. In this respect, it can be seen an event such as the Competition is important in stimulating active participation in a cultural event the first instance. Much can also be learned from research on students' participation in choral and band competitions in various settings. Both nationally and internationally, participation in competitions of various kinds is integral to the formation of emergent musicians, but findings from research for other age groups is also relevant. For example, Hurst (1994) found that the most important reasons for participating in music competitions were in how they could provide a sense of accomplishment for students, help maintain quality in their performances and deliver high standards for music education overall. Moreover, he found that competitions could also provide a means of evaluation for a teaching dimension or a performance goal.

Participation in choral competitions

In the context of choral music participation, for example, a recent study by Ó Conchubhair (2022) has identified numerous ways in which singers report benefits of participation in the international Cork Choral Festival, both as development of experiences in choral singing itself, as well as enhancement of interpersonal dimensions. Students at post-primary level in particular listed expressions of joy, excitement and pride in participation, with one referring to the process itself as an "uplifting experience" (p. 151).



Additionally, Ó Conchubhair identifies a range of wider benefits of the competition, such as the impacts on singers' developing choral expertise, conductors' skills, and the emergence of a wide range of opportunities that inspire composers to create new music for a range of choirs in various contexts. In his study, the overall theme in relation to participants' involvement is one of gratitude for the existence of the Cork Choral Festival in the first instance. One might imagine that many of the other long established choral festivals in Ireland (e.g., Derry, Navan) might report similar, positive effects on participants. However, a key insight from Ó Conchubhair's work is the added significance of the non-competitive dimensions of the Cork Choral Festival, such as the "choral trail" and the "Big Sing", as well as the provision of opportunities for choirs to sing pop/rock, Barbershop and Gospel music outside of the competition structures.

Elsewhere, in research from the US on choral students' perceptions of music competitions, Stamer (2004) also found that students considered their participation in such competitions to be inherent to music making and highly valuable in that it motivated them to practice more, work together, and improve their musicianship. In addition, success in the competition created enthusiasm for future participation and made choir participation in general more enjoyable.

Participation in marching band competitions

Turning to participation in marching band competitions, a study by O'Leary (2016) exploring perspectives of US band directors revealed that marching bands competitions were seen as a meaningful and influential part of participants' work. Here, band directors valued participation as educational experiences for their students. Although competition could sometimes be seen as a cause for tension, and directors acknowledged negative concerns in relation to the influence of competitions on their students, ultimately, they believed that the benefits of participation outweighed the drawbacks. Consequently, they still chose to engage in competitive activities. O'Leary concluded that the experience of participation in marching band competitions offered creative opportunities for directors to create custom materials for their players, and this was done with the motivation of winning. Competition was also seen to support the status of music from a teaching and learning perspective. O'Leary concludes that whether participants win or lose, "healthy competition encourages band members to constantly improve themselves" (p. 205).

Earlier studies by Brown (1980; 1985) also found that the vast majority of parents and students agreed that participating in band competitions builds self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. Likewise, a large study by Gouzouasis & Henderson (2012) found that students valued instrumental music and participation in band festivals as a positive, rich educational experience, and experienced a sense of accomplishment after a good performance. More recently, Lowe (2018) reported positive

feedback from students following an alternative large-scale cooperative music ensemble festival where key findings revealed enhanced enjoyment and motivation to continue and improve across all year levels and playing groups following the festival. In Malaysia, a study by Shah and Saidon (2016) also reported many non-musical benefits of participation in band competitions for high school students such as memorisation, and life skills as part of overall education that fostered responsibility, leadership and teamwork. Finally, Glasscock (2021) has advised that music educators should develop competitions that are in some way equitable, and that provide constructive feedback to participants, thus raising performers' standards overall.

Overall, it would appear that participation in vocal or instrumental competitions is seen to bring both musical and extra-musical benefits to participants in multiple ways.

Competition assessment criteria

However, to gain a deeper understanding of the Competition's inherent qualities, we focus in particular on the assessment criteria employed and expand these parameters.

The Competition's assessment criteria are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Competition assessment criteria	
Musicality and Presentation	Is the performance polished? musical? well presented?
Creativity	Was the theme addressed imaginatively and creatively?
Collaboration	Was the piece or song developed collaboratively, with plenty of input from students?
Inclusiveness	Does the group include – and successfully integrate – performers of different ages and/or abilities?

(Waltons website, 2023)

At first glance, these dimensions appear expansive and at the same time potentially in tension with each other. For example, can creativity be collaborative? Can inclusiveness assure musicality and a 'polished presentation'? How might different voices blend if they include children or young people at different stages of vocal development, or how might an instrumental music project a sense of finesse or 'polish' if the performers are attending a regular school, as opposed to a music school?

Fundamentally we ask, if these criteria serve as the demonstrated hallmarks of quality in the Competition, what underlying values might they inherently convey? How relevant might such values be when viewed

through the lens of current policy or through the perspective of recent, published research in education and music education. Taking together, one might then ask how relevant these dimensions of the competition are to music education in Ireland currently?

To address these questions, we consider each of the four main components of the assessment criteria in turn and explore how each one might cohere with relevant policy in Irish education, as well as recent research literature. As a whole, the expanded understanding of the key assessment ideas, based on policy perspectives and research findings, then interweave to create an overarching perspective to frame our understanding and interpretation of the Competition processes and outcomes as a whole. See Figure 1 below.

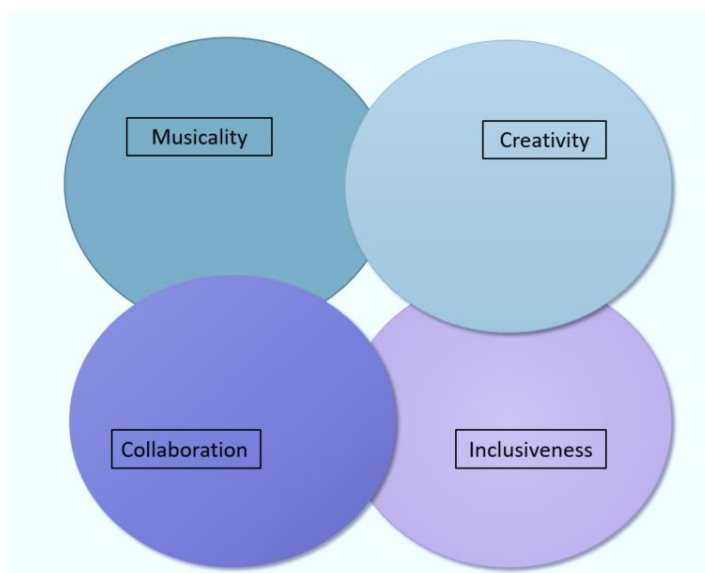


Figure 1. Assessment Components in the Competition


The next section presents each criterion in turn and explores its meaning.

Criterion 1. Musicianship and Presentation. *Is the performance polished? musical? well presented?*

Looking at the first criterion, we begin by asking how pupils in primary schools and students in post-primary schools might develop musicianship and performance opportunities. To do this, we consider the expectations articulated in curriculum policy at primary and post-primary levels, and opportunities for professional development for teachers on a national level.

Music education at Primary Level

In 1999, the release of the Primary School Curriculum (PSC) marked the beginning of a promising era for music education of children in Ireland. This event was seen as a significant moment in the history of primary




education in the country and the culmination of many years of collaborative effort and planning that involved all stakeholders and interests in the primary education system. The PSC was based on suggestions from the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) and also integrated the fundamental principles of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) and the Education Act (1998).

The resulting curriculum set out a clear ‘map’ for the teaching of music, comprising three integrated strands as follows: Listening and responding, Performing, and Composing. In this document, there is a strong sense of progression in the curriculum statement that is evidenced in a series of levelled statements. There is also a focus on developing children’s awareness of the musical elements in a graduated way through musical experiences located in the three aforementioned strands and their related strand units. Emphasis is placed on active listening, performance as a means of developing active musical understanding, and musical literacy as an extension of song-singing (Government of Ireland [GoI], 1999, p. 6-8). In addition, the curriculum emphasises the importance of music in children’s lives, as a means of self-expression and as a source of life-long enjoyment, serving to “deepen[s] the child’s sense of humanity, teaching him/her to recognise beauty and to be sensitive to and to appreciate more fully the world in which he/she lives. p. 3” All Irish primary school teachers received professional development related to the music curriculum in 2005-2006. They were advised to dedicate a minimum of two hours and 30 minutes a week to the teaching of the visual arts, music and drama if working a short day, and three hours a week if working a long day (GoI, 1999, p. 70). Support for the implementation of the curriculum was also made available to schools through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) at that time.

However, there has been no professional development for primary teachers in music education (or other arts areas) at national level since the once-off programme five years after the introduction the 1999 document. Moreover, a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, published by the Department of Education and Science in 2011 that called for increased time and focus on literacy and numeracy, impacted on the breadth of curriculum opportunities for pupils with significant implications for music and arts education in the ensuing deprioritisation of these subject areas. More recently however, the revised Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, n. d., launched 2023) includes a restatement of music as part of arts education which serves to underline the continuing importance of music education at primary level, and together with the inclusion of “creativity” as one of the key competencies, augurs well for the future of primary school music.

Thus, we see that in looking at the curriculum expectations at primary level, from a time and structure perspective, ample time and scope is afforded within the framework for teachers to justify preparation of a five-




minute performance, that might combine singing or playing instruments, and/or including a composed or newly creative element, together with some sense of musical critique, arising from the children's experiences of listening and responding to music. On the other hand, the absence of structured, continuous professional development in music education for teachers suggest that prevailing challenges at primary level might persist. Therefore, features of a musical performance that call for "polished, musical or well-presented", as specified in the Competition's criteria, cannot be assured in the absence of supports for schools.

Music Education at Post-primary level

In the 1990s, new syllabi for Junior and Leaving Certificate music classes were launched in Ireland, that emphasised performance and music technology, and allowed for school-based musical activities to be presented for assessment purposes. A report by the Department of Education Inspectorate in 2008 found that many post-primary schools offer a range of extra-curricular music activities, but that there was a gender imbalance in the uptake of music, with more girls than boys studying the subject. The report recommended that "Schools and teachers should strive to ensure a better balance between students' general musical development and the study of examination-related topics [and] involve the provision of more opportunities for students to experience a broad music education." The report went on to say that as well as using active learning methodologies to a greater extent, "Greater attention should be paid to integrating and synthesising the three curricular areas of performing, composing and listening in music lessons." A key recommendation also was that students should be afforded "more opportunities to display initiative and creativity through active and collaborative learning" and be provided with opportunities for students to experience a broad music education.

In 2012, a new programme for the Junior Cycle was introduced, which focused on developing key skills through the study of subjects as well as short courses. The Junior Cycle enabled schools to provide a range of learning experiences, including music performance, to help students develop skills such as collaboration, creative analysis, and critical thinking. The new syllabi for music classes were generally well received, and support was provided to help teachers implement the changes. Despite the positive changes however, according to the Central Statistics Office, a lingering gender balance in schools has persisted that sees music as predominantly the preserve of girls. In addition, while music is offered in 85% of post-primary schools, the uptake as an examination subject is just 10% (Long, 2015).

In relation to musical instrument tuition, as Long (2015) reports, in Ireland, state-funded primary and secondary schools typically do not offer subsidised instrumental music lessons, although some schools with enough resources may make local arrangements in certain settings.



Moreover, Conaghan (2022) voices strong criticism of the dearth of state music schools in Ireland, compared to other European counterparts of similar population sizes. However, Music Generation, established in 2010, has sought to provide as a partnership model of performance music education for children and young people in Ireland. Co-funded by U2, the Ireland Funds, the DES, and local partnerships, Music Generation has aimed to provide access to performance music education across various genres to children and young people. Activities often take place in schools during school hours, and in this regard potentially strengthen partnerships between local music communities and schools, which is a positive development. On the other hand, Long (2015) draws attention to the blurring of lines between the holistic music education presented in the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the outsourcing of performance-based model to Music Generation. As she sees it, in the primary sector, the latter model may be seen as replacing the former, while in post-primary schools, the growth of Music Generation initiatives coincides with a policy shift towards occasional projects rather than a developmental focus.

Smyth (2020) notes that larger schools, fee-paying schools and single-sex girls' schools were found to be more likely to offer art and music as subjects at Leaving Certificate level, as well as a broader range of extracurricular cultural activities (such as choir and musical instrument tuition). With regard to the wider population of young people therefore, access to school-based cultural pursuits was found to depend on the type of school they attended. From a gender perspective, take-up of Leaving Certificate art and music was much higher among young women, with music being more frequently studied by those from more advantaged backgrounds. The study also noted that in terms of involvement in social and cultural activities, over half (59%) of young people indicated that they never sang or played an instrument.

While Smyth notes that recent policy in initiatives such as the Arts in Education Charter and the Creative Ireland programme have supported participation in various creative activities for young people, the most significant challenge that comes to light from her study is the issue of equity that ensures “that all children and young people, regardless of their gender and social background, access arts and cultural activities” (Smyth, p(v), 2020).

Summary

Overall, this discussion suggests a certain stagnation of musical development in schools, or at least, an absence of systematic instrumental development. At second level, issues of gender, access and equity are of concern in relation to music education provision and practice. Taken together, these observations suggest that “on paper”, schools are empowered to provide creative and integrated music education

experiences for their students, but in practice, the approach is conservative and perhaps “by the book”.

A competition such as that designed by Waltons New Music School could therefore provide an important opportunity to spark interest and enlivening representations of music, providing a forum for generating diverse types of musical showcases, achieving gender balance, and heightening interest in music as a school subject.

Criterion 2: Creativity. *Was the theme addressed imaginatively and creatively?*

For the second criterion, this dimension suggests a focus on creativity as a concept, as well as processes that support that the creativity, such as imaginative and creative thinking. In looking at the construct of creativity, it is useful to trace relevant policy in Ireland that might be connect creativity to education and schools in particular.

Creativity in policy documents

Over the past ten years, as outlined earlier, the emergence of creativity in policy developments in education has been significant, with a number of initiatives impacting the work in schools in the areas of arts education and music more generally.

One of the first documents to act as a “policy bridge” between education and the arts was the Arts in Education Charter (2013) which described creativity as “an aptitude whose presence (or absence) has profound implications for personal well-being” (p. 7). In a similar vein, the Creative Youth Plan (Government of Ireland, 2017) also discusses the importance of creativity for well-being, defining it as “a set of innate abilities and learned skills: the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas and norms that bring additional value to human activity (p. 65).” This document draws attention not only to the importance of understanding creativity but also the “creative processes that enable us to apply our creativity usefully.” According to this document, creative processes are those that “involve thinking or behaving imaginatively with a view to achieving an objective, and with an outcome that is both original and of value.” (Government of Ireland, 2017, p. 66)

The Creative Ireland Programme

Arising from the Creative Ireland programme (2017) as an all-of-Government initiative to place creativity at the centre of public policy, the Arts in Education Charter has continued to enable the creative potential of every child (Creative Ireland, 2023). As one of the initiatives of Creative Ireland, Creative Schools was developed as a flagship project with a primary goal of fostering creativity in every school. A partnership between the Department of Education, the Arts Council, and the Department of



Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the programme enables schools to develop and implement their own creative projects and programmes. The programme is open to all primary, post-primary, and special schools in Ireland. Participating schools are provided with financial support and advice to schools on ways they can develop creative ideas and access arts and cultural resources and organisations. While focusing on the promotion of a holistic approach to education that values creativity and innovation, the programme encourages collaboration between schools and their wider communities. The programme also has a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and encourages participation in creative activity for children and young people from all backgrounds and abilities. Since 2018, the initiative has supported several hundred schools across Ireland in developing and implementing creative projects. However, there are few representations of creative music making within the Creative Schools activity and almost no performance platforms are offered as part of this scheme (Murphy & Eivers, 2023).

Research on Models of Creativity


While there are various concepts of creativity and many models have been modified and improved over time, such as the multiple versions by Amabile, the following ideas can be viewed as “spotlights” (Huovinen, 2021) that shed light on the topic of musical creativity in the context of music education and other educational settings.

First, Kaufman and Beghetto’s (2009) discussion of creativity seeks to move the debate beyond “big C” and “little c” which simply distinguishes between eminent creativity or “big” inventions, and the “little” acts of creativity that might be found in everyday practices. In essence, Little-c creativity might effectively be applied to the types of processes that occur in school contexts, but Mini-c extends this idea further.

Creative processes and products

Kaufman and Beghetto’s (2009) “Four Cs” model of creativity is a very useful framework for understanding and developing creativity in educational settings. The model builds on previous models of creativity but focuses specifically on the role of education in fostering creative thinking and behaviour. The four Cs in Kaufman and Beghetto’s model are Mini-c, Little-c, Pro-c and Big-c and are explained as follows:

- Mini-c: This refers to everyday creativity that is exhibited by individuals in their daily lives Mini-c creativity involves solving common problems in novel ways, and it is important for individuals to develop these skills in order to be successful in their personal and professional lives. The authors define mini-c as “the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events” (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007).
- Little-c: This refers to the creativity that is exhibited by individuals in specific domains or disciplines, such as music, cooking or




landscape gardening. The authors refer to Little-c creativity as a form of everyday creativity that involves developing expertise in a specific area and using that expertise to come up with creative solutions to problems within that domain. In time, and with prolonged engagement, a person might progress to Pro-c.

- Pro-c: This refers to the creativity that is exhibited by individuals who are recognised as experts in their field. Pro-c creativity involves pushing the boundaries of a particular domain and developing new ideas and approaches that advance the field. The authors typically refer to this as “professional creativity”.
- Big-C: This refers to the creativity that is exhibited by individuals who have made significant contributions to a particular domain or to society as a whole. Big-C creativity involves developing completely new fields or industries and making lasting contributions to society. The authors note that this is where the components of creativity espoused in the standard definition (i.e., novel and useful) are assumed to be present and exercised in a way that is beneficial to society.

According to Kaufman and Beghetto (2009), creativity can be fostered in the classroom by providing students with opportunities to engage in creative thinking and problem solving across a range of domains. Teachers can help students to develop their mini-c and little-c creativity by encouraging them to think creatively about everyday problems by providing them with opportunities to explore different domains and develop expertise in specific areas. Teachers can also help students to develop their pro-c and big-C creativity by encouraging them to push the boundaries of their discipline and to think critically about the ways in which their work can make a lasting impact on society. Overall, Kaufman and Beghetto’s four Cs model of creativity provides a framework for understanding the different levels of creative thinking and behaviour that individuals can exhibit.

The Waltons Music for Schools Competition provides many opportunities for schools to explore Kaufman and Beghetto’s Mini-c and Little-c as part of their process of preparation. In its simplest form, one might ask how teachers would go about selecting just 40 individuals to imagine a 5-minute, musical and creative process in a way that adheres to the expertise of the school while fulfilling the parameters of the competition? Additionally, one might wonder how teachers might include or incentivise students to participate without risking being selective? How might students convey an idea musically through a creative melding of different genres that resonate with the lifeworlds of the students? How could pupils convey an expressed ideal or theme with limited resources or props, without use of language, yet foregrounding musical fluency? However, other models of creativity also demonstrate that students can be taught to recognise its qualities (Kokotsaki and Newton, 2015), and by alerting students to the various components of a musical work, learners can learn to apply such




parameters to their own creative thinking in musical compositions, e.g., in considering how and what they want to convey in their compositions, in making decisions about their use of musical elements, instrumentation, musical devices, evocation of ideas and overall communication.

Criterion 3: Collaboration. *Was the piece or song developed collaboratively, with plenty of input from students?*

Research in the US has shown that involvement in group music-making activities at high school/post-primary level supports students' learning and social responsibility to each other, enables them to maintain commitment to the endeavour, and develop bonds that translate into the achievement of the group's goals (Sward, 1989). Among the identified benefits of participation in band as a collective activity is the development of more mature relationships, stronger levels of teamwork and cooperation. From a social perspective, participation also supports a sense of belonging, companionship and social development (Brown, 1980). In Ireland, an in-depth study of post-primary students engaging with group music making conducted by Berrill (2014), also draws attention to not only how the integration of musical capacities in performing, listening and composing occur, but also how the experiences of making music stimulates social skills, as well as new classroom management strategies. Moreover, students experience what Berrill (2014) terms *jouissance* and *flow* in group performance where memorable experiences and heightened awareness arise from the shared endeavour. Similarly, in a Spanish study of the process of developing a collaborative music production project for secondary and high-school students, Cuadrado and colleagues (2017) reported how, through their participation, the students' social and emotional skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, technological skills were positively impacted, and relevant to the current study, resulted in improvement in the musical creation as well.

In a recent study, Kaufman and Beghetto (2021) put forward the idea of a "creative experience", and although the theme of collaboration is not expressly foregrounded here, the study coheres well with the perspectives articulated in the implied social dimension within the third characteristic below. In the first instance, the process involves a principled engagement with the unfamiliar, and a willingness to approach the familiar in unfamiliar ways. In other words, a creative experience can be defined as novel 'person–world' encounters grounded in meaningful actions and interactions, which are marked by the principles of: (i) open-endedness; (ii) nonlinearity; (iii) pluri-perspectives; and (iv) future-orientation. The following section explores these three concepts in greater depth.

1. **Open-endedness** encompasses both a person's action orientation and the types of encounters they have. Here, action is seen as a willingness to explore emerging directions, move away from pre-determined outcomes, engage with the unexpected, and be open to different perspectives. This



orientation is demonstrated by creative individuals who are able to embrace the potential of going “off script” and are open to the different views of others (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2017). Beghetto and Corazza (2019) note that the principle of open-endedness in creative experiences may require a blend of traditional methodologies with more dynamic and nuanced approaches.

2. Non-linearity recognises the trajectory of the creative process, which is often messy and unpredictable, and does not follow a predetermined plan. While creative processes have been traditionally conceptualised as occurring in stages, here the authors draw attention to the sub-processes that make up these stages and the back-and-forth movements specific to real-life creative processes. Creative experiences often follow the logic of abduction, which involves making qualitative jumps in thinking about what “might be” the case rather than being trapped by “what is.”

3. Pluri-perspectives

As creative outcomes are open to multiple interpretations and forms of action, reflecting a multiplicity of perspectives is regarded as crucial to creative experiences and for opening up spaces of reflexivity and possibility. The authors argue that pluri-perspectivism releases us from singular ways of relating to the world, and thus “gives everyone an opportunity to find new meanings and new value in what they produce”. Additionally, and especially in the context of music making, the authors add that pluri-perspectivism “also invites audiences to participate in one’s creative experience”. The authors suggest that having different vantage points of the process is important in maintaining these perspectives.

4. Future-orientation: Finally, the future-orientation recognises the different time qualities involved with the process – imagining what might take place, even if it “exists only in people’s imagination” (p. 278). The authors go on to say that specific to the creative experiences, “the pull of the future is embedded in the structure of the actions and interactions that constitute it”. They take the example of a child’s pretend play and argue that even in that context, the activity is oriented towards a future make-believe world, that is not defined but exists in multiple ways.

Summary

In sum, the creativity criterion of “Collaboration” is potentially generative of a range of musical and creative processes that could occur in classrooms. Research indicates that group music-making activities at post-primary level can support student learning and social responsibility. Participation in band experiences can lead to the development of mature relationships, teamwork and a sense of belonging, while collaborative music production projects improve participants’ social and emotional skills, problem-solving, teamwork, technological skills, and musical creation. Finally, a recent study suggests that a “creative experience” can generate open-endedness, non-linearity, pluri-perspectives, and future-orientation and



that each of these underlines both the validity as well as the centrality collaboration on the process.

Criterion 4: Inclusiveness. Does the group include – and successfully integrate – performers of different ages and/or abilities?

Terms such as inclusion, inclusivity and inclusiveness have become widely used in education settings in recent years. A broad understanding of social inclusion connects a range of philosophical, cultural and social policies and legislation, together with their realisation or enactment in various contexts. Inclusion in education is typically associated with provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), but also entails a broader focus on issues of equity in society. It is this wider focus on inclusion as a dimension of social justice within music education (see Murphy & Ward, 2021) that is of interest in this section.

In discussing inclusion in the context of the Competition, the first issue could relate to access to and representation of learners of all ages and abilities, irrespective of their intellectual, relational or physical dis/abilities or their cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, while the second dimension could be concerned with the representation and inclusion of music itself, in any of its styles, genres and traditions.


International organisations at the forefront of music education research and practice, such as the International Society for Music Education (www.isme.org) and the National Association for Music Education (www.nafme.org) in the US, emphasise respect for all musics and all cultures, and underline the belief that every individual has a right to music education. Similarly, NAFME draws attention to the importance of music as a curricular subject for all, due to its value in enabling students to be creative and collaborative, and to communicate effectively. Inclusion in music education is seen as a key concept that is associated with diversity traditions and opportunities. Specifically, in a statement on access and equity in music education, NAFME emphasises the importance of

equitable access to music education for all students, so that students, regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, economic status, religious background, sexual orientation and identity, socioeconomic status, academic standing, exceptionalities, or musical abilities, can participate in the making of music within their schools. (NAfME, 2023)

The following section discusses educational circumstances and opportunities for children and young people from three inclusive perspectives: special education, gender, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Special Education Needs


Historically, education for children and young people with additional needs was provided in segregated settings in Ireland (and elsewhere) whereby



their schooling occurred through placement in special classes or in special schools. However, the movement towards the integration and inclusion of children and young people with additional needs began to evolve in Irish schools throughout the 1990s, stemming in part from the wave of progressive approaches which occurred across Europe. Among other developments, the Salamanca Statement (1994) informed the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education and the Malaga Declaration (2004) as well as the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN Act; Government of Ireland, 2004). Schools were allocated increased resources to meet the educational needs of all children and to cater for a continuum of needs across every school setting. Concomitantly, increased numbers of support teachers and special needs assistants were recruited and new models of support were developed in mainstream schools, including individualised education planning and the differentiation of learning content and objectives. However, since the EPSEN act, little systematic professional development has been offered to support the teaching music to children with additional needs in mind—from cognitive, social, linguistic or psychomotor perspectives.

McCauley (2020) notes that the overall effectiveness of inclusive education has been uncertain as it has conferred advantages to some students with disabilities (Winter & O’Raw, 2010), while also resulting in numerous failures (Allan, 2008). McCauley goes on to say that some experts suggest that the inclusive education movement has halted (e.g., Slee, 2014; Warnock, 2005), and become a problematic educational project (Slee, 2014) that has lost sight of its objective (Kozleski et al., 2014). Moreover, he notes that due to the vagueness of the language around inclusive education, the field has become dominated by positivist and essentialist epistemologies which have limited the shift in thinking about disability from individual learners to wider society and its related cultures and institutions (Baglieri, 2017; Florian, 2014). The more concerning aspect of this, McCauley argues, is that such thinking also constrains teachers’ thinking about inclusion, reducing it to a narrow range of options (Skrtic, 1991; Hart, 1996), especially in cases where the school lacks the capacity to address students’ challenges (Black-Hawkins et al., 2007).

A study undertaken in 2018, drawing on Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data and focusing on the experiences of pupils and students with various special educational needs, noted that some positive progress had been achieved in certain areas for students with special educational needs between the ages of nine and 13. However, despite some progress in wellbeing and verbal reasoning at nine years of age, the study found that 13 year old students with SEN were still faring worse than their peers without SEN in a number of areas (Cosgrove et al., 2018). Providing a complementary perspective on children’s experiences, a separate study of newly qualified teachers’ (NQTs) experiences in Irish schools revealed that



these NQTs often perceived a disjunction between the both the advocacy for, and emphasis on, inclusive teaching in their initial or preservice teacher education, and what they actually observed in the realities of practices and contexts in schools (Hick et al., 2019). Taken together, this research suggests that the delivery of meaningful inclusion of children with SEN continues to pose challenges in schools.


Gender

From a gender perspective, Ireland is unusual in maintaining a high number of single-sex schools compared to its European counterparts where co-educational schools feature as the norm. Among concerns for early school leavers, particularly males, a study on gender titled *Sé Sí* (Department of Education, 2007) identified the tendency towards certain subjects by gender, with boys more likely to study practical subjects such as technical drawing and construction, and girls to study traditionally female-dominated subjects such as home economics, art and music. More recent research by Smyth (2020) that drew on GUI data, pointed to gender and social background differences and the relationship with levels of arts and cultural participation. Here, 17-year-old girls were identified as much more likely than their male counterparts to make music (singing/playing an instrument) and to take part in structured cultural activities (such as music/drama clubs). Socio-economic background persisted also as a factor in distinguishing between those who participate in various cultural activities where it was found that those from professional/managerial or graduate families were more likely to be involved with music making and related activities. However, at younger ages, no marked differences in participation were evident by migrant status or having a special educational need (SEN).

As Smyth attests, earlier involvement in cultural activities is strongly predictive of participation at 17, and one could argue therefore that participation in various music, drama, dance and art activities at primary level would be an important factor in predicting the future cultural engagement of children as they approach adulthood. Schools are well situated to support such activity, although they are not the only structure to do so.

Economic status

Echoing Smyth's (2020) study as cited earlier, experiences of poverty also preclude young people from participating in activities that would be considered the norm for others (European Anti-Poverty Network in Ireland [eapn.ie], 2023). The percentage of children living in consistent poverty in 2016 was 11.1% and the percentage of children with an at-risk poverty rate of 19.3%, making them a highly vulnerable age group. Non-Irish nationals were also noted as being a particularly at-risk group. The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) also reports that the net income of non-Irish nationals in Ireland in 2015 was 18% lower than that of Irish nationals. Moreover, almost a quarter of non-Irish nationals were at risk of poverty



compared to one-sixth of for Irish nationals. In March 2023, according to the Department of Housing, 11,754 people were reported homeless, including 3,431 children – the highest number of homeless individuals since records began in 2014. In order to overcome poverty in Irish society the EAPN (2018) advocated for a strategy founded explicitly on human rights, thus echoing Drudy and Kinsella’s (2009) call for a more thoroughly equitable society with true participation for all citizens.

Summary


Given both the pervasiveness of socio-economic issues as outlined here, and the nature of schools in Ireland and the slow pace of inclusive approaches in education, it is vital that concept of “inclusiveness” is maintained at the forefront of educational endeavours, and especially in music education where practices suggest that many children and young people are more likely to be excluded from meaningful musical practices due to structural issues in Irish society.

While social inclusion is a broad construct, dimensions of inclusion such as SEN, gender and socio-economic status continue to impact on the experiences of children and young people in schools in Ireland. The specification of “Inclusiveness” in the Competition’s assessment criteria is therefore particularly warranted.

Benefits of participation in group music making activity

This section discusses benefits of participation in group music making activities, and in particular for children and young people. Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between music, children and young people with many studies citing a wide range of benefits. For example, across several studies, Hallam found many beneficial effects for students such as enhanced self-esteem, positive relationships, competence and optimism when they engaged with informal learning in small groups in the music classroom (Hallam et al., 2016; 2017; 2018). Overall, group music-making has been found to support children in improving their social and communication skills, cooperation and teamwork (Creech et al., 2013; 2016).

As revealed in GUI (2020) data, teenagers place a significant importance on listening music in their lives more than other cultural activities. This finding also coheres with studies of the value of music to young people elsewhere, compared to other age groups. Hallam and Hermonides (2022) point to a large body of studies that have indicated that music, especially when enjoyed during leisure time, contributes to how individuals define themselves and negotiate their identities. In terms of active music making in particular, according to Israel (2012), participating in group music-making provides opportunities for individuals to broaden their cultural experiences, discover new perspectives and places, and foster social cohesion by expanding their knowledge. This not only benefits the participants, but it also encourages parents to attend cultural events and become more culturally aware in general (Creech et al., 2016). Deane et



al. (2011) discovered that although music-making was effective in initially engaging young people in projects, it was often the development of a trustworthy and non-judgmental relationship between a young person and their mentor that supported positive changes. A recent meta-analysis undertaken by Ye and colleagues (2021) included ten studies that focused on the effect of music-based interventions on aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents. In terms of aggressive behaviour, the authors found a significant decrease as a result of music-based interventions, and conversely, in relation to self-control, the authors found an increase in this dimension when comparing the music-based group with the control group. One can thus conclude that group music making confers many benefits on learners.

Added to the aforementioned criteria in the Competition and the wider benefits of music making outlined above, the next section focuses on the construct of “situational interest” which may also play a role in considering how the Competition arouses interest and motivates learners.

Generating situational interest

Situational interest is a psychological construct that refers to the interest that individuals develop in a particular topic or activity as a result of being exposed to that topic in a specific context or situation, such as a particular challenge or novel methodology. A key feature of situational interest is its affective quality. In this respect, situational interest can play a significant role in students’ engagement and motivation towards learning, particularly in subjects that they may initially find uninteresting or challenging. Hidi (1990) suggests that situational interest may have a greater impact on a learning experience towards the beginning but can also potentially contribute to the development of long-term individual interest.

Situational interest can also play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion in education. Research has shown that students from underrepresented groups may be more likely to develop situational interest in a subject if they are exposed to role models or real-world applications of the topic (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Schiefele, Krapp, & Winteler, 1992). Likewise, by promoting situational interest in these groups, educators can help to broaden participation and promote diversity in education.

Situational interest is typically gauged by seeking people’s emotional reactions to a task or topic such as the level of enjoyment or entertainment that it brought, and the extent to which they found the task or topic attractive or appealing. This underlines the conceptualisation of situational interest as a positive emotion.

In a doctoral study of situational interest in the context of music teaching in fourth grade (fourth class) in an elementary primary school in the US, Roberts (2012) found that (i) pupils’ situational interest was enhanced when they were engaged in novel activities or experiences including activities that featured elements of surprise or humour; (ii) Interest levels

increased when the pupils believed that they were capable of achieving success in certain activities, especially those that presented a challenge that was achievable. (iii) The pupils also showed greater interest in educational activities that allowed them to use visual or physical modalities. (iv) Lastly, the pupils became interested in learning when their experiences involved creativity.

Discussion

Overall, each dimension of the Competition contributes to a conceptual model for exploring the experiences of the competition, first in generating situational interest but also in each of its distinctive and overlapping expressions of musicality, creativity, collaboration and inclusiveness. See Figure 2.

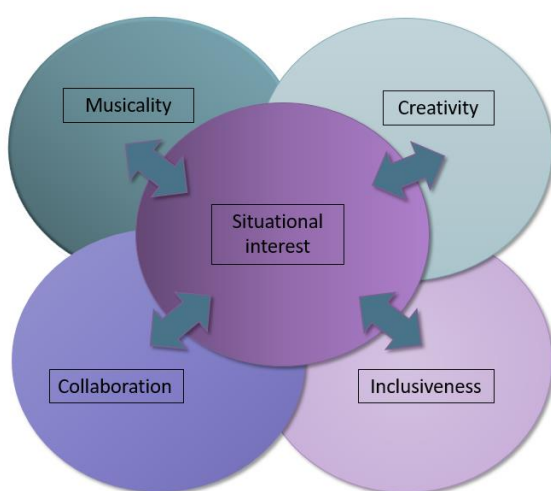


Figure 2. Conceptualising Music Making in the Competition

A key consideration is the interplay between each of the dimensions and the important research findings embedded in each one. From an equity perspective, as Smyth (2020) attests, earlier involvement in cultural activities is of high importance, and is strongly predictive of participation at age 17. Access and equity issues also feature in discussions around inclusion from a SEN perspective for students, as well as from a professional development perspective for teachers. However, one could argue therefore that affording opportunities for participation in various music, drama, dance and art activities at primary level would be an important factor in predicting the future cultural engagement of children as they approach adulthood. Schools are well situated to support such activity, although they are not the only structure to do so, and teachers too, require incentives that encourage their own situational interest to emerge, as well as opportunities to develop their individual, open-ended creative practices (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009, 2021). In the next chapter, we present our methodology and approach to data analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The methodological approach to this study is qualitative since it seeks to understand how and why the participants in the study act as they do in a chosen educational setting. The research is oriented to the social context of the participants' worlds—the children, students, teachers, school leaders and others—as well as the interconnections between the educational, musical and social dimensions of their experiences. To this end, focus is placed on subjective human experiences and on the meanings that participants attach to the educational events in their lives. Such sensitivity is warranted in the context of uncovering the meaning behind the huge effort that the schools have made to participate in the competition (Check, Russell & Schutt, 2017). This study also employs an interpretivist paradigm which is deemed suitable for the research subject because the information gathered is qualitative in nature (Mead, 1964). The authors of the study acknowledge that their own understanding of the subject may be reflected in the research and analysis due to their background in primary education and music education. As such, they acknowledge this subjectivist epistemology which suggests that individuals cannot separate themselves from their understanding of reality (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Case studies

In framing the interpretation of each school context, case study methodology was used. A case study refers to a detailed examination and analysis of a particular system, unit, or phenomenon, in context, to better understand a social or cultural issue or phenomenon. More specifically, Merriam (1998) defines qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a programme, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). Case study method and has been widely employed in the social sciences and while having connotations of medical cases, the approach is also used widely in educational settings (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006). Case studies typically focus on a single individual, organisation, process, event, role, encounter, period of time, or programme, as defined by Miles et al. (2020) and Yin (2006). Two main types of case studies are typically found in the research literature: instrumental and intrinsic. Researchers use instrumental cases when the focus is on understanding something larger than the specific case being examined, while intrinsic cases are used when the focus is on the particularity of the case itself. In the current study, while each situated case was intrinsically of interest, data gathered largely served a more instrumental purpose in exploring the phenomenon as a whole and in arriving at overall insights on the many dimensions of the Competition.

Collective case study

With a focus on a group of cases in this study, the concept of collective case studies is also put forward as an overarching data structure which is commonly used in social science research when the focus is on a group of cases, rather than a single case or individual (Stake, 2006). The approach reflects the fact that the cases share common characteristics or experiences while also being diverse enough to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied. However, in collective case studies, identical methods of data collection and analysis are undertaken, since the researchers seek to understand each individual site while also developing an understanding through making comparisons across all sites. In the current study, within each of the case study sites, multiple sources of data were employed, such as interviews, observations in situ, and documents, to gather rich and detailed information about each case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

Data gathering techniques included questions to encourage exploration, reasoning based on observations and experiences with an emphasis on the social setting of educational actions, and a concentration on the personal perspectives and interpretations of the individuals involved with regards to their perspectives of the Competition experience. Triangulation was then employed to verify the accuracy of the data and the interpretation that follows while a combination of deductive and inductive approaches were then employed to analyse the data collected, seeking patterns, themes, and relationships across the cases, as well as unique features of individual cases.

Document analysis

The process of document analysis involves qualitative content analysis of any materials (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) at school level that contribute to understandings of creative and inclusive practice at school level, such as programme notes, teaching materials, music notation, production and planning notes. Video methods (public domain) (Thomson, 2009) of final performances of each school were also undertaken by researchers to study the performances of each participating school. The videos also served as prompts in the interview situations to remind participants about the experience of the Competition, and to ask how various elements came about.

Sampling

Methodologists such as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) describe purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling technique that is often used in qualitative research. They suggest that purposive sampling involves selecting participants who are believed to be particularly knowledgeable about or experienced in a particular phenomenon of interest. The authors note that the goal of purposive sampling is not to create a representative sample of a larger

population, but rather to select individuals who can provide rich and detailed information about a specific topic.

In a similar vein, Stake (1995) emphasises the importance of selecting cases that are relevant to the research question such that they can provide rich and detailed information about the phenomenon of interest, as he remarks, “The real business of case study is particularisation, not generalisation (p. 7).”

In the current study, the sample was drawn from previous primary and post-primary finalists in the Competition. The data set is presented below.

Table 3.1 Data set

Sites: 4 Primary and 3 Post-primary school sites	
Participants	Data collection technique
School Principals/leadership	Individual interviews
Classroom teachers/Music teachers	Individual interviews
Pupils	Focus group interviews
Post-primary students	Focus group interviews
Artist/adjudicators	Individual interview
Document analysis drawing from open access material related to the Waltons Music Competition for Schools, video material, and documents shared by participants in situ.	

Research questions

The overarching research question sought to understand the schools’ experiences of participation in the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition and the teaching and learning potential located in a model of creative processes that involved children and young people in creating a musical piece. Questions for teachers and school leaders focused on the experience of participation in the competition, how that participation came about, the role played by the teacher and others, strategies employed and motivations for participation. The next set of questions focused on processes for developing the music, such as focusing on the given theme, incorporating creative or extended ideas, how participants collaborated, and how various classes or individuals in each site were included in the endeavour and how teachers weighed up decisions during the process. These latter dimensions were explored as subquestions within the interview processes. Questions for pupils and students followed similar themes using age-appropriate language and more facilitative and inclusive strategies to ensure that all participants in the focus groups could articulate their views, particularly where their views may have differed from others. Wider questions also sought to establish participants’ overall attitudes towards the experience as well as advice that they might lend to future participants as well as policy developers.

Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis is a widely used method for analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data. It is a flexible method that can be used with a variety of data sources, including interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey responses. It was therefore selected as a useful approach to analysis of the data.

Triangulation

Methodological triangulation was achieved through alignment of the data from observations, interviews and the artefacts of the Competition (Cresswell, 2014). The use of the different data sources provided a variety of results and insights, allowing for cross-referencing of the material for analysis.


Ethics

Information provided to participants adhered with the Research Ethics Policy of Dublin City University, ensuring, among other elements, beneficence to participants, non-maleficence, informed consent, confidentiality, a plain language statement that outlined the purpose and nature of the research, and the right to withdraw at any time.

The previous participants in the Waltons Music for Schools Competition were contacted by telephone and with a follow-up email, and were invited to participate in the research. A strategy for undertaking the research in each site was presented that allowed adequate time with each of the key agents (principal, teacher, music teacher, external musician, artist or dance teacher, special education teacher, pupils) relevant to each site. Participants were also asked to identify any relevant resources that they would like.

There was no obvious vulnerability associated with the participants who took part in this study. The participating children were drawn from mainstream classrooms. They had already participated in a public showcase performance in each case. The research was conducted in focus groups to encourage openness and discussion, and to further ensure anonymity. The PI and all members of the research team were highly experienced teachers of children and/or teenagers. It was emphasised to the participants that the study was not an evaluative study; rather, the aim was to understand the experience of participation in the Waltons Music for Schools competition—in which they had already experienced success, and not to compare or evaluate individual schools, children or the creative process itself.

Although all data on the entries to the competition and various winners over the years is available publicly, the authors chose to anonymise the



school names and the identities of any individual participants who participated in the study.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the data methodology and methods in the study and the key considerations in that endeavour. Qualitative approaches were identified as the main approach with case studies providing an organising strategy as well as a methodological lens for framing and exploring the data.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents findings from the data gathered in the study. As outlined in the previous chapter, we utilised a qualitative research design, predominantly in the form of collective case studies (Stake, 1995). Each case study site involved group and individual interviews with the students and teachers respectively. Together with video analysis of each showcase event that comprised the school's entry for the Competition, the process enabled us to build up a detailed understanding of the inclusive and creative approach to music making in each school.

A number of similar patterns emerged from the data collected in the schools visited throughout the course of the research, especially when viewing the primary and post-primary schools as distinctive groups. Age and maturity of the pupils and students and the organisational features of school were naturally prominent factors in this regard. However, there were also idiosyncratic dimensions in the schools' organisational and creative processes by virtue of the school's size, geographical location and the distinctiveness of the school population in terms of gender, socioeconomic status or diversity.

Case studies

This section presents findings from individual schools as case-studies, where the interviews with the teacher, principal, pupils and students, as well as observational and other visual data has been analysed and synthesised to produce one overall description of the school's experience as a single 'case'. Here the cases are of intrinsic interest (Stake, 1995) as they highlight unique experiences and perspectives of the participants in particular contexts.

Note: the following selected case studies are based on the actual schools that participated in the Competition. All schools described are Department of Education recognised schools and none of those described are fee-paying schools. However, all school names and geographical locations have been anonymised to protect the identities of the participants. The anonymised school names also enable the reader to consider how "ordinary" schools enable possibilities for creative, collaborative and inclusive participation in a number of ways.

Following the pseudonymous title for each school, a statement that encapsulates the distinctive feature of the school's participation is presented as a heading, before a longer elaboration of findings.

Ballinrath Post-Primary School

Opportunity to foster student leadership, with curricular significance

The development and facilitation of opportunities for student leadership is a strong feature of Ballinrath co-educational, post-primary school. Here, the music teacher presented the idea to the students and they were encouraged to take initiative and lead with ideas of their own before involving teachers. This approach was a deliberate pedagogical strategy by the music teacher and school leadership to encourage independence and ownership of ideas among the students and in keeping with the overarching themes of the Junior Cycle programme. The approach also reflects the ethos of the school in seeking to afford curricular choice to the students, while developing their sense of responsibility.

The excerpt from a focus group interview below illustrates the students' ownership in the process and sense of initiative in wanting to communicate a strong message through music.

Sean: *We took the theme in a literal sense as in war and world peace. To unite countries. We decided to have a meeting ourselves before we went to the teachers. We came up with the first song to use.*


Jessie: *We gave up our lunch time to come in to the library.*

Sean: *The next day we had meeting with the teachers and presented them to the teachers and they liked our ideas. We started thinking up of how music crosses borders. Someone thought up of national anthems.*

As well as developing the students' independence, responsibility and creativity, the school also actively facilitates leadership opportunities, in the belief that this approach is more effective than simply prescribing ideas or managing the project through direct teaching.

The students reported that participation in the competition on first occasion whetted their appetites to enter a second time. They felt they understood what was required to "up their game" (student interview) and had the means to do that. They deliberately sought out instrumentalists, singers, dancers and various contributors to their performance and were united in their mission to achieve success and describe their teacher as "the glue" to making everything happen.

However, despite the school's emphasis on music and the school's success the second time they entered the competition, the students did not feel that there was enough sense of celebration within the school when they placed in the Competition, as compared to the recognition given to



sports. They were determined to prove that music could also achieve pride of place in the school and immediately began a campaign to that end.

While this could suggest that musical creativity may be somewhat marginalised within the school, despite its importance to the students, it also reflects the nature of school activities, and the dominance of sport in news items and the national media. It also underlines the importance of the availability of multiple avenues to music performance and of the need for concomitant media support for musical endeavours.


Eastcastle Post-Primary school

School as a music rehearsal space that nurtures diversity

Set in an urban area with a diverse school population, Eastcastle post-primary school supports a strong culture of informal music learning (Green, 2008) drawing from the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students. A striking feature of this school is the conspicuous support for music that the school management has enabled, where it is evident that students are afforded opportunities to play any of the pianos in small practice rooms and open spaces in the corridors. Thus, the students meet frequently at breaktimes to improvise, practice, or create their own music individually or in groups. These informal learning opportunities occur both outside as well as within the formal timetable, and are positively encouraged by the music teachers and school leadership. Moreover, the musical styles include improvisation, jazz, popular music, multicultural styles, beatboxing and rap, all of which afford opportunities for creative music making, identity development and self-expression.

Unlike many other post-primary schools, more than one teacher shares responsibility for music teaching in the school. The teachers are strikingly collaborative, creative in their approaches and highly committed to the mission of affording every opportunity to their students but also challenged by the extent of their workload. Preparation for the competition therefore happens in the interstices of the formal timetable—lunchtimes and after school. However, the approach suits the authentic approach to music making that the school affords.

In the competition performance, there is a notable sense of ownership over the material. Cultural diversity is evident among the performers, in the range of music chosen, in their singing abilities as well as in the instruments that they play. This approach to music-making reflects the diversity of the school community together with students' musical lives outside of school, which are often family and community based, and draw from strong cultural traditions. In the interview that followed, one of the teachers juxtaposes the lifeworlds of the students and the sense of privilege and formal music education associated with the concert hall:



“I remember being so proud seeing the finished product...especially when you know the backgrounds the students come from. They don’t even know how lucky they were to perform in the NCH”

In their reflection on their performance for the Competition, the students talk about how they prioritise authenticity and connection with the audience, rather than sticking to a specific theme or worrying about the venue. In this regard, the school’s profile of informal music-making as well as structured choral singing holds more appeal to students than more formal approaches associated with the standard choral and orchestral settings. The Competition affords the students opportunities to develop their creativity through improvisation, whereby they spontaneously add their own harmonies, as an extension of their cultural contexts for music making. In this regard and the competition parameters are ideally suited to the school and this is reflected in the students’ relaxed, joyful and authentic performance.


Kilbawn Post-Primary School

In the absence of formal music education, no limits to participation

For the music teacher in this newly established post-primary school, organising a music competition comprising students without a background in music was a somewhat daunting process, complicated by the fact that the participants were spread across different age groups and classes. A second organisational as well as musical challenge was the desire by the teachers to involve students who were not formally taking music as a subject in school, and this constituted the majority of the participants. Despite these challenges, the competition provided a unique opportunity for students to showcase the range musical and artistic talents that were distributed across the school, build individual and collective identities, and demonstrate the importance of music within the school community as a whole. In this regard, the competition’s focus cohered very well the inclusive ethos of the school.

Musical creativity as identity construction

Now having established itself as a school that has performed at the National Concert Hall, the musical profile of the school has been elevated, and in this sense, the Competition has been pivotal in activating and generating a greater focus of the range of both formal and informal musical and dance expertise in the school community. For the first time, highly skilled ballroom and contemporary dancers, whose expertise would otherwise have remained hidden, had the opportunity to synchronise their sharp, elegant and graceful movements with the musical skills of their fellow students in an authentic way in their school setting. This is something that would not occur otherwise, due to the absence of an appropriate competitive or social context, especially for dancers with high levels of performance expertise in niche areas. In this regard, the Competition serves as an advocate for emerging musical and dance



identities of the students. Having provided a platform for such emergence of expertise even once and created awareness of students' interests, it is likely that the Competition experience will continue to foster students' creativity and promote talents that would otherwise be obscured in the school.

Rossglen Primary School

Whole school approach to music teaching as a shared vision


This large, urban primary school, set in a growing commuter town, seeks to create an immersive and inclusive musical culture by placing a strong emphasis on whole-school instrumental music teaching. To achieve this, the whole-school approach is centred on classroom teaching of musical instruments, using bespoke, graded, instructional booklets devised in the school. The programme begins with tin whistle from infants classes, and then progresses to the fiddle from first class upwards. Pupils then typically transfer to other instruments and play in the school orchestra. The school leadership team in music, comprising the principal and teachers with specialist expertise, believe in enabling music for all through demystifying music and empowering teachers to participate in a sustained, structural model and that involves and supports all classroom teachers. In particular, the school principal believes that music should not be a specialist subject and has therefore been proactive in promoting a distributed model of teaching and learning that includes all classroom teachers in the school, irrespective of their background in the subject. As the principal remarks,

“It seems very easy for someone to come in but doesn’t really work in terms of sustainability. But it’s more important to have someone who’s there with the children every day and knows how they learn, and by equipping someone who’s already there, you have something that is self-sustainable.”

Collaboration and collegiality

A strong sense of collegiality and shared vision is evident in the school where multiple initiatives operate harmoniously, and teachers work collaboratively to create a wide range of opportunities for the children in an enriching and attractive learning environment. The teachers coordinating the music programme are accomplished musicians who have studied music themselves from an early age and thus bring a strong musical and situational identity, as well as leadership, to their teaching. For them, role models who made learning accessible and enjoyable in their own formative years continue to inspire their work, especially in seeking opportunities for their own pupils now.

Maintaining a sense of ownership of the music curriculum—as teachers for their pupils—is integral to their collective commitment. As a result, music is part of the fabric of the school life. Children bring instruments to school as readily as school bags and showcase events come easily. However, such



showcases belie the sustained, collaborative effort and commitment to music teaching and learning in the school. Overall, the school's dynamic approach to music education with its strong emphasis on whole-school instrumental music teaching together with a commitment to making music accessible to all pupils makes for a very vibrant and inclusive ethos.

Fergalstown Primary School

Playing to strengths in traditional Irish music

Fergalstown National School has a strong culture of music, which includes a traditional music *grúpa ceoil*, tin whistle playing, and elaborate, biennial “*massive, big school productions*” as one teacher describes. The school has its own tin whistle teaching manual for teachers, devised by one of the teachers, and also avails of the support an external traditional music teacher in the locality. It also maximises the use of their school hall and has invested in its own sound production equipment. However, some teachers find teaching the music programme somewhat challenging at times and because of this, the school distributes its expertise through teacher collaboration and maximising opportunities for complementarity in teaching. To that end, a visiting teacher has contributed traditional music tuition on a weekly basis for many years which provides an authentic, regional experience of traditional music. The school has a diverse population, including children from the Traveller Community, and although it is a somewhat rural school, it attracts children from the outside the area who make the journey to the rural school due to the many opportunities it affords as well as its characteristic spirit and bespoke programmes – including the music programme. In particular, the school is strongly committed to including and encouraging children from minority cultures in musical activities and providing them with opportunities they might not otherwise have in their homes or neighbourhood.

Reflecting on alternative modes of performance

Despite performing very well at their previous performance at the NCH, the school was disappointed with their own production in that they felt that they had not fully anticipated how the sound of the instruments would project on the large stage. To address this, the teachers have devoted time to thinking about how to incorporate voice and movement in the future performances, and how to provide their pupils with the technical knowledge and experience required on a larger performance venue.

On the other hand, the staff are critical of other schools that they involve professional musicians as they believe that this brings an unfair advantage and may not represent the school community. They teachers have also analysed past performances to determine the winning formula. In the future, the school wants to continue making music accessible for the children. However, the teachers see that involving the children in the creative process is a more challenging one, especially when they have a desire to win rather than just participate. From the children's perspective,

they see the approach as largely teacher-led but in a school that offers a wide range of activities and high ambitions, they seem happy to accept the status quo.

When asked what advice they would give to another school, the children offered the follow:

I would say to the kids don't do what your friend did in the audition because you won't get picked because you'll be the same.

I'd say try your hardest and don't think like that people are making fun of you and for like performing really well because if you try your hardest it will pay off.

I was one of a few boys in the Waltons so, I would say like don't be following anybody just go and do it yourself.

Well, it's a lot of hard work but it was bringing you somewhere that you might never get to go again. So...be like prepared to do a lot of hard work.

Further suggestions from children and young people are offered in the recommendations section of this report.


Abbeynew Primary School

Interplay of musical and performance cultures

The school leadership in this large provincial primary school has long pursued a vision for music through a comprehensive music programme, recognising that for any school looking to enter a music competition at any point, the building of a solid music education foundation would be a prerequisite—as evidenced in the comment: “*Any school starting now would be twenty-five years too late.*” To that end, the school has established a strong musical culture that encourages various types of music learning groups, showcase events, and where every child learns tin whistle from a young age, building on a resource developed in the school itself. Maintaining a socially inclusive lens, the focus in the school is on promoting access to music education for children who would otherwise not have an opportunity outside of school.

Inclusive pedagogical strategies

The young performers in the showcase expressed a strong level of ownership of the Competition and the process preparation. They readily understood the importance of practicing individually as well as in small groups before putting all the parts together. Here, the culture of practicing was strongly embedded. However, the social side of performing, experiencing enjoyment while playing, and engaging in informal music



making with each other during breaks were also key elements as expressed here:

“Yeah, you make really good friends doing music. It’s a really good way to get to know people... A lot of times we’re singing on the bus to school. Songs that we’re doing for the thing, we’d sing them out”.

The children felt that their opinions were incorporated into the performance, including their music genre choices, choices between individual pieces, and movement on stage. They also talked enthusiastically about their own self-expression through the music, the importance of feeling the music and letting it flow, and although still just young children, recognised that it took a lot of practice to reach that point. In this regard, the Competition served to heighten their sense of musicality.


Developing bespoke musical and inclusive pedagogical materials was integral to the musical culture of the school. The teacher arranged the music in a creative, child-friendly way, using different color-coding prompts and supports for the players, and building the children’s confidence in their preparation for the staging of their unique piece. According to the teacher, this careful planning and preparation was key to the success of the experience, irrespective of whether or not the school won a prize.

The Competition model was also particularly motivating for the children, although this did generate a sense of pressure and parental expectations. Interpreting the broader theme of inclusion and portraying that in their model involved the children in thinking symbolically, kinaesthetically, creatively and musically in various ways. Here, they came up with creative ideas of their own to express the theme, such as the children switching instruments, boys holding hands with girls, singing in different languages and musical styles, and children from different competitive Irish dancing schools in the locality working together—a significant challenge for children in a small town who dedicate long hours to competitive dance! Moreover, for the children, suggesting and then enacting these ideas generated a strong sense of meaningfulness and ownership of the process. Finally, the teacher’s approach was both child-centred (Dewey, 1902), constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) and musically apposite, in assigning melody or harmony parts to each child and in considering their needs through unique, individualised approaches.

Rathcullen Primary School

Building interdisciplinary thinking from the musical, cultural and historical hinterland, and fostering inclusion

Set in a location of rich cultural heritage, the historical context and location of the school infuses many creative projects and provides a constant



stimulus for collaborative and interdisciplinary opportunities through music and other subjects.

As a small, rural school, Rathcullen does not have a formal classical musical profile featuring orchestral groups and choirs, but it does have a tradition of engagement in creative activities at a whole school level, which typically involve mixing pupils across classes and age groups. Musical contexts where this occurs include school musicals, special musical moments in the school to mark seasonal or liturgical events, and collaborations with popular musicians such as a local Irish indie rock band that hails from the region. This strong sense of engagement with music is embedded in the community together with a strong drama society that enhances the local cultural scene.

One of the unique aspects of the creative culture in Rathcullen is the underlying democratic and participatory approaches to curriculum where emphasis is placed on listening to students' ideas and taking them on board. This approach fosters the integration of diverse perspectives and experiences into the school's creative projects, resulting in more inclusive and representative outcomes, as well as a strong sense of school identity. In addition to the school's own staff resources, expertise is often drawn from in the wider community. For example, the school participated in a community "Oscars" project and the senior classes developed a boardgame on the theme of sustainability with support from the local community, thus consolidating the strong connections between the school and its hinterland. The teacher offers a working definition of creativity as "*Being able to portray an idea in a way that pulls on different elements— music, vocals, percussion, instruments, colour, music, movement. So, taking an idea and portraying it in a way that's very different.*" She also elaborates on her working definition of inclusion as

That every single child is – for sure – taking part, and feels included! It's not just a case that I'm 'ticking the box' because I'm the teacher standing in front of them saying 'That's great. All 28 of them are here.' I can say hand on heart that for some children who can tend to feel a little bit isolated in different ways—and their parents as well--the experience was really good for them. Taking part in the Competition has changed that.

Overall, in this school, music serves as a powerful tool for exploring, understanding and appreciating the historical, social and cultural context of the school. Through a collaborative and inclusive approach, Rathcullen has been able to leverage the strengths of its community to create engaging and culturally rich creative projects that reflect and celebrate its unique identity.

Overarching features of the case studies

While the schools presented in these brief case studies share many commonalities – for example their village or provincial town identities, they each have approached the process of creativity uniquely, drawing on the expertise and traditions of their school and foregrounding their strengths accordingly. Further discussion of thematic features are presented in the next section.

Motivation for becoming involved

The competition creates a high level of situational interest (Roberts, 2012, Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011) for schools and their students. Teachers who took part in the competition indicated that the conditions of the competition process are inherently motivating for pupils and that pupils who observe their peers taking part in the competition one year are often motivated to participate in it themselves the next year. As the teacher from one of the schools outlines

“We’ll say a week or two after the Competition, you’ll have a lot more children coming in, saying, ‘I’d like to be in the orchestra’ or ‘I’d like to be in...you know’, They’ve seen what’s gone on and suddenly the ambition, you know, goes up a little notch or two, they want to be part of it.”

One school also made the point that the first round of the Competition (where schools record themselves) takes place in a school setting and is therefore very holistic for students, taking place in a natural setting with educators who are used to working with children and know the children well. There was also the sense in many schools that the competition element encouraged students and teachers to produce a more polished performance:

“Yeah, there is an element though, I suppose competition does...It does polish it. It polishes it and enthuses and parent like things that are, you know” (Primary Teacher)

Inclusion

The format of the competition ensures each school can be included, whether they have a strong tradition of taking part in music competitions or not, whether music learning takes place informally or formally. One school makes reference to beat-boxing in school between classes and students bursting into song spontaneously. In many of the post-primary schools, teachers explicitly highlighted the openness of the competition in facilitating the inclusion of non-music students as well as those studying it formally in school. Schools talk about the challenge of including a balance between inclusion and musical standards. Inclusion took different forms in each school:

The Creative Process

Most schools began the process by having a group brainstorming session. In one instance pupils met together independently before meeting with teachers. In another instance the teachers decided the songs and brought them to the students who then decided how to structure them. After this initial stage followed an iterative process where the performance was shaped by both teachers and students alike to varying degrees. This was described by schools as being a “brutal” process, involving time, commitment and space. One school described the process as being tense, stressful and at times fraught with conflict as teachers and students strove to realise mutual agreement with each other. All schools found it to be ultimately rewarding. None of the teachers worked on the performance alone, each had support from other teachers (Ballinrath), external teachers (e.g. dance teachers) the school principal (Rossglen) or in some cases a parents (Fergalstown). In the initial stages of the process teachers described it as “organised chaos” (Rossglen) but all schools described a moment when it all came together, usually the first time the arrangements were put together without stopping. In defining creative process one teacher described in a s multidimensional concept:

I suppose being able to portray an idea in a different way that pulls on different elements. It could be here. In this particular one, it's music, it's the vocals, it's the percussions, the instruments, the movement to go along with – the colour, everything. So, just taking an idea or a theme and portraying it in a way that's very different (Rathcullen, teacher interview)

Idiosyncratic nature of music in primary schools

Musical provision at primary level clearly varies. The findings revealed however that there is a strong sense among primary schools who have an established music instrumental learning programmes wanting to showcase their efforts and have them recognised. There are very few platforms for them to do this in any structured way, other than the local arrangements that the schools might make for liturgical or seasonal events.

However, musical identity was important to each of the primary schools. It seems strangely coincidental that three of the primary schools in the case studies had created their own whole-school, graded music teaching schemes based on the tin whistle in the first instance, and beginning the tuition in very junior classes, such as senior infants. The schools also demonstrated a very strong sense of ownership and identity in relation to their music making.

A further feature of music at primary level was the team approach that involved the school leadership, the principal, at least one music teacher with music expertise and others who played strong supportive roles in realising musical possibilities in the school.



The next chapter presents cross-case themes explored across each school site.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion of Cross-case Themes

Undoubtedly, the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Competition has proven to be a highly motivating experience for teachers and students alike. In fostering a creative and fresh approach to musical performance in schools, the format is quite distinctive from the usual structures and formalities that typifies many choral and instrumental competitions. As a result, teachers are enthusiastic about participation in the competition and have devoted considerable time to its preparation.

Several key features stand out in terms of what makes this initiative both attractive and educational for participants. This chapter presents a discussion of these key features that are evident from our review and analysis of documents, visual data, observations and interviews with principals, teachers, pupils and students across sites nationwide.

To encapsulate our learning and understanding of the Competition, we focus on the dimensions of the performance assessment criteria and use this as a heuristic device to frame key themes. We begin by taking a broad view of the first theme of (1) “musicality” and include in that a focus on the parameters of the Competition itself, its inherent appeal, and how the entry requirements have served to motivate and generate student-centred musical experiences. Next, we look at the theme of (2) “creativity” – how participants took inspiration from the theme and then explored ideas through creative processes in their schools. Third we look at how (3) “collaboration” was made manifest through planning and coordination, the sharing of goals and cooperation among participants to create a coherent musical piece. Lastly, the many interpretations of (4) inclusiveness in school settings is highlighted and put forward as a crucial concept for developing and maintaining a thriving school community.

A final discussion addresses benefits and opportunities of becoming involved. The study concludes with advice and recommendations for schools as well as some implications of the study for music education practices at school level.

1. Musicality: Inspiring musicality

In this section we focus on how musicality is inspired as a sociocultural construct through the incentivisation that is expressed in the Waltons RTÉ fm Music for Schools Competition in the first instance. Coupled with this, is the significance of, and inspiration afforded by, the National Concert Hall venue as a focal point and motivational force in inspiring participants to perform in national cultural institution as part of the finalists’ concert.

Inspiring musicality through staging the Competition itself

As emphasised earlier, music competitions have been found to bring positive benefits for students (Hurst, 1994; Lowe, 2018) and participants more generally (Ó Conchubhair, 2022). Interview data revealed that the decision to enter the Waltons' Music for Schools Competition was an idea that was typically put forward by the teachers in the first instance. Given the intensity of the school year, with the many competing special events that typically feature on school calendars, setting teaching time aside to focus and prepare for extracurricular work was a considerable commitment that usually involved extensive effort from teachers, management staff, students and pupils alike. A key question to participating teachers therefore was their motivation for participating in the competition in the first instance. Themes that emerged in the interviews at schools level were: (a) the design and parameters of the competition; (b) the prospect of performing in a prestigious venue; (c) the musical and extra-musical benefits for the pupils or students; and (d) musical possibilities afforded by the theme.


(i) The design and parameters of the competition: Timing and flexibility

Three unique dimensions of the competition design and parameters of the competition are outlined in this section that illustrate the appeal of the competition itself.

At the outset, and from an organisational perspective, the fact that the theme was announced early in the school year provided the first incentive to enter the competition due to the ample time afforded for preparation. In particular, teachers were drawn to the competition format, its broad musical appeal and the fact that there was no restriction on the types of musical genres or related art forms that could be included as part of an overall musical presentation. This flexibility, in itself, helped to generate a sense of individuality and ownership of ideas, and to underline each school's unique musical identity. The move away from a traditional choral or instrumental competition to one that was multi-genred, but time limited, enabled schools to imagine more bespoke presentational styles that suited the particular range of music and musicians within their schools.

(ii) Prerecording

The design of the first round of the competition was also seen as a "safe space" (Boostrom, 2008) where schools could try out, rehearse, perform and record their performance in their own time. The specified five-minute duration of the performance was also considered ample in allowing schools sufficient time to showcase the breadth of musical ideas without having to rehearse vast amounts of music. Prerecording the entry was particularly appealing to students as it was seen to be in keeping with young people's ways of engaging with and making music as a more



recursive learning process (Volioti, & Williamon, 2017). It also facilitated teachers in managing students' involvement, creative contributions and in taking an external perspective on the school's own internal work. Finally, prerecording itself is relatively low-cost, sustainable and very practical for busy teachers and learners.

(iii) Expansive and inclusive predetermined criteria

The given criteria of creativity, collaboration and inclusiveness, together with qualities of musicality and presentation, while predetermined, were seen to have particular appeal to schools in myriad ways, suggesting a more open-ended approach to performance, rather than the rigidity that might otherwise be found in technical requirements of standard choral or instrumental competitions.

Thus, the parameters set out possibilities for schools in the first instance, whereby the competition might foster a special kind of creative and musical development, one that would be more open and culturally inclusive, while portraying each school's unique musical identities.

(iv) Musical possibilities

The idea of "crossing musical borders" was both an idea and goal, as each school sought ways to think about what this might mean in terms of embracing "different" types of music, from popular, to classical, to traditional and exploring music education more generally. The idea of music crossing borders can be traced in the ethnomusicology literature (Shelamay, 1996) before globalisation made the mixing of styles more mainstream. In each school, the underpinning concept of inclusiveness also informed the approach to musical ideas that were incorporated into the performance, and opened a space where schools could proactively imagine possibilities and see these expressly validated in the process.

Inspiring musicality through access to a prestigious venue

Performance spaces are integral the musical experiences of performers (Coppola, 2021; Picaud, 2022). As the location for the competition, the National Concert Hall evoked a strong sense of motivation and excitement amongst participating schools at the prospect of performing on the stage of such an iconic venue (more latterly the National Cultural Institution for Music). For children and young people from provincial villages and towns, such opportunities would normally be extremely rare, and even visiting other cultural centres locally would also be exceptional, even for students in schools near larger, provincial towns and cities due to constraints of time and resources. Therefore, the idea of travelling to the capital city and performing on such a large stage was very attractive to the young people and their teachers alike featured as an added to the attractiveness of the competition.



2. Creativity: Emergent creative processes and possibilities afforded by the theme


The idea of the theme for the performances provided much fruit for the emergence of creative thinking through discussion and debate in the first instance. As a cross-department policy imperative (Creative Ireland, 2017, 2023) as well as one that can foster student's thinking (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009), the Competition makes a valuable contribution to students' creative lifeworlds in schools. Perhaps because of its open-ended but aspirational nature of the theme itself, the process of selecting material to address the theme afforded opportunities for democratic methodologies that foregrounded student voice in the first instance. Interview data from both post-primary school students and their teachers described the creative process as protracted and democratic, comprising loosely overlapping stages as follows:

Table 6.1 Creative musical processes	
(i)	Raising initial interest in participation
(ii)	Processes of selecting participants through auditioning ² —due to the high levels of interest;
(iii)	Open-ended discussions on the meaning of the theme, from disciplinary, interdisciplinary, as well as from musical and artistic perspectives
(iv)	Processes whereby individual students' musical expertise and other students' musical interests were melded to form a wide canvas of musical and communicative possibilities
(v)	Processes of focusing and narrowing down the selection to create a logical story line
(vi)	Coaching and practicing in small groups, often outside of regular timetables, to refine the musical qualities
(vii)	Rearranging and refining the jigsaw pieces of the performances
(viii)	Rehearsing the overall piece to convey meaning in a musical, artful and meaningful manner;
(ix)	Sharing the performance at school level, and/or sharing the performance with the wider school community.
(x)	Sharing the performance online.

At primary level, the stages of evolution of the ideas were more teacher-led, but still very much grounded in the interests, experiences and capabilities of the pupils in a naturalistic way, while remaining cognisant of the contextual influences within each school community from ecological, social, cultural and historical perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, each school came up with a unique and distinctive interpretation of the theme, one in which the pupils and students were completely immersed and invested in, due to the preliminary processes of weaving and attuning the emergent ideas with the available musical capacities and capabilities of the pupils or students.

A particular theme, for example, “music has no borders” generated musical ideas for performance in a variety of ways. One approach was to

² While the issue of auditioning may seem to be at variance with the principle of inclusion, schools are required to limit their entry to just a maximum of 40 participants to ensure some level of equity between schools of different sizes. Selection processes at school level can occur through natural year groupings, or inviting those interested, while involving a larger group for performances in the home institution



explore the diversity of musical styles and traditions from different cultures related to the students in the group (Murphy & Ward, 2021), and create a musical performance that showcases this diversity. This involved incorporating instruments, rhythms, melodies, and harmonies from different cultural traditions into the performance.

Another approach to bridging borders was to focus on the universal language of music and how it can connect people across space and time. Music was also seen as a vehicle to break down barriers and bring people together. In post-primary schools, students tended to draw from popular music and lyrics that specifically referenced issues such as difference, inequality, injustice and exclusion. A specific focus on borders and boundaries was extended to address contemporary issues and experiences of immigrants and refugees, and ways in which musical ideas could convey inclusion across geographical boundaries and cultures.

However, not all performances relied on the lyrics of songs to convey literal meanings. Schools talked about how they gave time to discussing the significance of instrumental music in various settings and cultures. In their performances, it was clear that they also sought to express ideas non-verbally through dance and music, and symbolically through gesture and use of colour.

Strong performances featured a storyline or narrative for the performance, such as a musical journey around the world that explored different cultural traditions, or how music has evolved and changed over time. Other performance conveyed the story of an individual's fate through the interweaving of evocative musical ideas.

In sum, the Competition's themes served as a blank canvas for pupils' and students' creativity and innovation, allowing performers to experiment with different musical ideas, dance forms and approaches, and push the boundaries of traditional musical styles and other genres.

3. Developing Collaborative Competences

Collaboration between students and teachers, focuses on the emergence of individual and collective identities, the key learning for teachers and learners, perceived benefits in more general educational terms and students' and pupils' roles in the process.

Identity formation

First and foremost, the competition created a sense of pride in the school, as students had the opportunity to showcase their individual and collective musical identity (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003) as a school in a very public way and on a larger platform. It also provided an outlet for students to express themselves musically and explore ways in which different ideas could be conveyed, improved, extended or complemented by another art form.

Mentoring, coaching and practicing

Within schools, students also took the initiative to practice together, mentor and coach each other—often in their own time—engaging in processes of collaboration and co-musicking (Espeland & Stige, 2017), developing leadership skills and confidence as they shared their expertise with others and improved their performances as a whole. From a social perspective, the competition also offered students the chance to see and learn from and with other schools as they viewed each other's videos, or watched the live performances on the NCH stage, noting how each addressed the same theme uniquely through their music.

Impact on next generation of teachers

As participation was open to the whole school, not just music students, the experience of the competition created a ripple effect of musical enthusiasm that extended beyond the competition itself. In some post-primary schools, teachers commented on how even in the short number of years since the competition's inception, past students who went on to become music teachers themselves, had since entered the competition with their own students, thus following in the footsteps of their mentors (Conkling, 2003).and extending their expertise and love of music making to the next generation of young people.


Raising the school's musical profile

Other benefits remarked upon by school principals was the way in which the profile of music was elevated through participation in a music competition at national level—particularly at post-primary level where sporting events tend to dominate the school news. Additionally, principals noted that the raising of school's profile through the video recordings and attendance at the National Concert Hall enhanced the awareness of the wider public of the school's musical expertise. As noted by Hurst (1994), for schools that compete for students in the locality, this was a very important dimension as it afforded recognition of the range of expertise in the school.

In summary, the Waltons Competition offered a plethora of musical and extra-musical benefits for students, including broadening and sharpening musical expertise, opportunities to develop teamwork skills and a sense of ownership and pride in their achievements. The competition also offered an opportunity to focus specifically on the meaning of inclusivity and creativity uniquely in each school, thus making it an invaluable experience for all involved.

4. Developing Inclusion

As outlined earlier, inclusion has been an important topic in music education in recent years although the realisation of inclusive approaches in practice continue to pose a challenge in many educational context (McCauley, 2020)



Meeting the criteria for inclusion was conveyed in varying overt ways. For some, it was a deliberate effort to involve students with special educational needs or abilities in their performance, or to communicate a theme of their performance through Irish Sign Language or other languages. But for most schools, inclusion continues to be a much more subtle process.


As an embodied strategy, inclusion was expressed and performed idiosyncratically in schools through knowledge and awareness of children's broader educational needs and economic circumstances, especially at primary level. At post-primary level, inclusion was found to infuse teachers' organisational and teaching strategies in both subtle and overt ways. Such strategies ranged from promoting teamwork with mixed age groups and genders, to demonstrating different creative forms, especially aspects of arts or dance practices that would otherwise be rarely seen in school settings. Here, opportunities were afforded to foreground children's and students' expertise in Irish dance, folk dance from a wide range of cultures and traditions; ballroom, contemporary, modern dance and classical ballet—among others—as aspects of a wider but less visible type of engagement and expression in music.

Musically, performances also demonstrate and emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion (Campbell, 2005) in the range of musical styles or instrumentation, and in the interweaving of genres. One school describes students engaging in beat-boxing in school between classes, and then bursting into song spontaneously. Again, motifs from popular songs that expressly foreground inclusion also feature, e.g., 'Same Love' by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. On visiting the schools, it was clear to the researchers that for some, diversity in music making was a very natural aspect of the school's culture—especially in post-primary schools, but the Competition format created an opportunity to discuss the precise meaning and messages in a more thoughtful but artistic way.

On the other hand, for some of the smaller primary schools that tended to be more conservative in their approaches to music teaching and learning, and the Competition served to inspire them to make more deliberative efforts to act and demonstrate inclusiveness. Through individual and focus group interviews, the subtleties behind these efforts were uncovered—for example a primary school that mentored children from the Traveller community to sing solo as part of the performance, fostering the children's authentic singing style of the Traveller community. Behind the scenes too, were quiet stories of schools that went to great lengths to ensure that children who were more economically disadvantaged were afforded access to the same music lessons or instruments that their peers had in the school.

As one teacher remarks:

Inclusion for me is that every single child is for sure taking part and buying into this and feels included. That it's not just a case that I'm



ticking the box there because I'm the teacher standing at the front and I'm saying, 'That's great. All 28 of you here.' But that they actually feel themselves – and I can definitely say with a hand on heart looking around at all of those children— included. (Primary Teacher interview)

As the range of schools on the Irish landscape evolves from those that espouse a more conservative to a more progressive ethos, schools that foreground and celebrate their capacity for diversity are more evident. Likewise, the ethos of intercultural and multidenominational schools, and schools that embrace diversity, is expressed in various ways, for example through displaying the Yellow flag for inclusion (yellowflag.ie) or the Pride flag to indicate solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community and gender equality, as well as celebrating diversity across the range of human sexuality. These symbolic expressions of inclusiveness and diversity were also apparent in some of the showcase performances in the NCH through use of imagery, symbolism, movement and song lyrics in particular.

Key Teacher Learning

The key teacher learning in these music education processes has involved the relinquishing of some professional responsibility for dictating the content of the learning. In this regard, the teacher's stance is expressed in moving away from didactic methods towards greater facilitation of diverse ideas, enabling students' choice and empowering the students to lead musically. Here we see an interweaving of many years of classroom instrumental or vocal teaching together with informal learning techniques across a range of musical genres (Green, 2008) particularly at post-primary level. For many teachers, the outcome of such classroom processes and pedagogies has led naturally to the teacher *not* assuming the role of conductor of the performance on the day, but affording responsibility to the students.

For some teachers, having to limit the number of performers on the stage to 40 was a challenge, and working in a loose framework where different interpretations and ideas were emerging, proved challenging. On the other hand, the process reaped musical benefits as the students' innate leadership emerged in many cases and voices that would otherwise be marginalised in school music were enabled to shine, be recognised and valued.

Overall, the process was participatory, consultative and democratic to a certain extent in post-primary schools, but less so at primary level where the younger children still benefitted from guidance from teachers in preparing for a performance on such a big stage, both physically and metaphorically. At post-primary level, student leadership was clearly evident and served the groups well in demonstrating their wholehearted involvement and ownership of the performances.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The production of the Waltons RTE lyric fm Music for School Competition, and the attendant singing, choral, band and orchestral activities that participants engaged with have become part of growing tradition of student and teacher codirected creative activities that have contributed to the evolution of creative music education in Ireland. The experiences of participants—in collaborative creativity involving teachers and students alike—reveal that such activities play a highly valuable role in engaging students with music. Moreover, the experience provides a range of benefits for the young musicians in terms of developing their capacities to work creatively and collaboratively in making a rounded performance. It motivates them to practise, it provides opportunities for them to build community at local level and to represent their community on a national level. The process requires perseverance and commitment, but ultimately generates pride in the endeavour. For those living at a distance from the capital city (i.e., the vast majority of participants in this study), engagement with the NCH as children and young people rarely occurs, for several geographic, economic and cultural reasons. However, the Competition provides an opportunity to attract and engage small local communities, to help them evolve as musicians, singers, performers and enable them to see themselves represented on the stage of a national institution for a brief, but very precious five minutes of their lives. In this safe but prestigious environment, the children and young people stand to experience local acclaim via a central national institution.

In post-primary schools, the Competition provided an important outlet for music making in schools. In this regard, the model has the potential to meet the aspirations of the Department of Education in achieving greater balance between examination-related topics and opportunities for broader music education experiences. The focus on criteria can serve as to sharpen focus and promote formative growth in music making.

Participation may perhaps also foster better representation of gender, due to the diversity of musical genres that Competition promotes. Undoubtedly, some the diversity of musical genres await greater representation in formal examination syllabi in senior post-primary contexts, and here, the approaches to music making afforded in various schools could hasten this process. Moreover, for students in disadvantaged contexts, the Competition also provides a step towards increasing opportunities for access to music and the arts, as outlined earlier by Smyth (2020).

Thus, the Competition is an important structure alongside a range of musical offerings in schools, where some are led by musicians and arts organisations, some run at local level at schools, some taking place in the community through traditional groups and regional orchestras, however thinly spread. However, few opportunities exist that match the unique model of the Waltons Competition in its formative and supportive qualities,

its modelling of what creativity, collaboration and inclusion might mean through musical expression, and in enabling schools to participate wholeheartedly in the endeavour. While there is substantial commitment required of schools in submitting their entry in the first instance, the aims are well intended, and as this research reveals, underpinned by a strong framework of inclusion, creativity and collaboration in music making. Offering pupils and students choice in involvement, as well as fostering their own sense of musical autonomy and creativity are important steps towards more vibrant and original musical possibilities in schools.

In addition, it is in the underpinning dimensions of the Competition's criteria and the related dynamic processes where the study reveals the interplay between each of the key dimensions, and the capacity for situational interest to ignite more powerful elements of musicality, creativity, collaboration and inclusiveness in the longer term. All of these features warrant further consideration in imagining what other models of authentic music making might look like in school contexts.

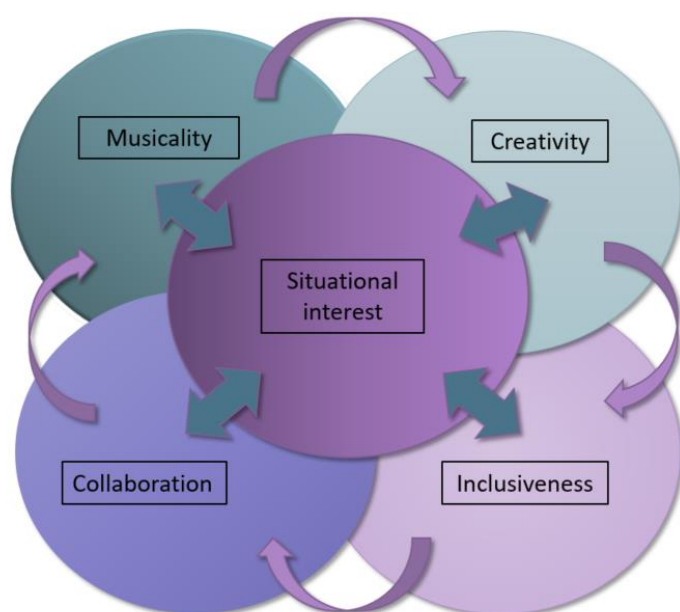



Figure 3. Conceptualising Music Making in the Competition as a dynamic process

It is worth noting the potential for situational interest to spark engagement with any of the dimensions of music teaching and learning in the first instance—be it in performing, composing or active listening and responding. As Roberts (2012) noted, pupils' situational interest in the form of novel activities or experiences can be employed to engage children and young people in various activities. Here it is important that they feel they can achieve success, and where they can use various modalities to achieve that success, especially in when engaging in creative strategies. Such mechanisms can be employed to foster pupils' and students' interests in composing as much marginalised strand in the music curricula at both first and second level.



Undoubtedly, teachers employ micro examples of situational interest models in motivating reluctant learners across a range of subject matter, but the opportunities to consider how this construct might inform other dimensions of music making is important. This is essential as recent research would indicate that Music as a subject in primary schools has become less popular in schools (compared to Visual Arts in particular), and this is unfortunate, given its potential for student growth and fulfilment.

In conclusion, the experience of participation in the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition illustrates how the work of school communities interweave in themes of collective meaning making through music that fosters identity construction and inclusive experiences, ultimately leading to a wide and fulfilling range of creative and possibilities.

Recommendations from Participating Pupils and Students to future Participants

The children and young people in this study were asked to put forward suggestions that might make to other schools in preparing to participate in the Waltons RTÉ lyric fm Music for Schools Competition.


Here is their advice:

1. Study the videos
2. Study the theme.
3. Listen to all ideas.
4. Have an open mind.
5. Think outside the box.
6. Give everyone a voice.
7. Practice, practice, practice to get performance really polished.
8. Be brave.

Recommendations from Participating Teachers to future Participants

The following recommendations are presented as advice schools. The advice emerged naturalistically during the research conversations with participants, and thus reflects the authentic and encouraging voices of teachers and principals who generously gave their time to share their experiences.

1. “Watch the videos and learn from them, tap into what’s in your school, let the students lead, influence thinking when necessary; study the theme
2. Choice of song is very important, it needs a strong structure; it is a more rewarding process if students are allowed to lead it; let the process flow; use student ideas and allow them to make decisions; let the students have more ownership if there is no conductor on the stage, but you need to be doing this from the start; go for it; do your best; don’t be afraid to perform, let loose; be innovative.
3. Let the music flow; communicate with the audience; You’re not just taking part in competition—you’re putting on a show; Keep that sense of connection with the audience; there’s no limit to what the kids know; let them experiment
4. The Waltons Competition needs a lot of preparation so develop a culture of inclusion and differentiation; Experience the competition and get to know the standard; Smile more; make improvements, play harder pieces, add dynamics and details; Videos are a great tool for critical reflection; have fun and listen; communicate; try your best; everyone has to try their best; choice in music important to the children; inclusion means different genres to include everyone; Use resources online; Challenge the students to be better musicians; Be prepared for a lot of work
5. Give the theme to the children first; don’t be possessive as a teacher; it could be a springboard for something else.
6. Practice during holidays; foster student commitment; keep the music varied.
7. Enable access to all children in the home school of the same material; differentiate for ability; inclusion should mean every child in the school (especially children who wouldn’t ordinarily otherwise learn); Build links with community; Don’t forget Comhaltas Ceoiltoirí Éireann.
8. Watch the videos and let yourself learn and be mentored by other schools that have been involved in the process; share insights from experience; Recognise the limitations of once-off workshops and build up a school structure as a music platform for the children.
9. Make music accessible in the school; draw from the traditional music background of teacher; teach notes; teach by ear; create a culture of music in school where teachers can swap classes and play to their strengths, e.g. swap hurling for music; Include a specialist external teacher as well to relieve pressure on teachers; Invest in a good sound system; Recognise how competition



polishes a performance and enthuses people; Value parental support as it is important for the financial aspect too; Try not to be disappointed if you don't win.

10. Consider how some of the excerpts or pieces from the group performances could form a stepping stone to Junior Cycle or Leaving Certificate music practical performance experiences.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Policy

1. Support for classroom teachers at primary level in meaningful teaching of music needs to be provided as part of an overall curriculum. Where instrumental music teaching is taught in a school by external tutors, this cannot replace the role of the classroom teacher in leading Primary School Curriculum for music for even one year. The integrated nature of the PSC in music provides many opportunities to develop both teachers' and pupils' musicianship, and this should be encouraged.
2. For Post-Primary schools, the study of music as both an examination course as well as part of a suite of short courses for boys needs to be incentivised, so that they can have opportunities to engage with music making in multiple ways, especially as collaborative endeavour.
3. The many genres of music and dance that children and young people pursue outside of school and that are marginalised in school contexts need to be carefully considered so that opportunities can be created to showcase such work and build stronger, inclusive communities where young people can develop and celebrate their individual artistic identities.
4. The design of the Waltons Music for Schools Competition is a bespoke one that has been sensitively conceptualised by John Mardirosian over many years. Consider how it might be scaled up regionally while maintaining the integrity of the model.
5. Teacher education policy, specifically curriculum in higher education for student teachers at primary and post-primary levels, stands to gain from the understandings to be gleaned from this research. A greater emphasis should be placed on teacher collaboration and affording space for the integration of art forms towards high artistic ideals in all schools, irrespective of geographical location, resources or other constraints.


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