The Role of Creativity in Music Classroom Education

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General introduction

“The principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done - men who are creative, inventive and discoverers” - Jean Piaget (1980)

More than thirty years ago, the old educational psychologist Jean Piaget emphasized the importance of creativity for individual and social development. Since then, creativity has been extensively researched and valuable insight gained in support of his view. In many countries of the world, however, school systems still educate according to traditional academic criteria. Academic subjects such as mathematics, languages and science rank above art subjects in terms of number of lessons given, as well as recognition received from peers, teachers or public opinion. According to Sternberg (2003), academic subjects focus mainly on the development of analytical intelligence. Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, however, posits that intelligence consists of three parts: Analytical intelligence, creative intelligence and practical intelligence. Therefore, students with talents and abilities in other areas, who struggle with academic ability, may be neglected in the traditional school system. Creativity is not only important for individual and social development but it is also essential to music. Classical pieces need the creativeness of the player to reinvent them every single time they are played. Compositions need composers who not only create new musical ideas but also know how to transform the ideas into actual musical products. Creative ideas constantly contribute to the development and experience of music both for the player and for the listener, which keeps music alive and exciting.

The art subjects, such as music, might be the most obvious place to develop practical and creative abilities (NACCCE report, 1999). The question, however, is whether teachers feel that they can develop these abilities in the academic school system. At a meeting of music teachers of the Northern Netherlands (Studiedag 2011, PCC), some of the teachers expressed concern that they would not be taken seriously if they moved away from standardized theoretical exams and approached the subject in a more practical and creative way. Consequently, they reported spending a lot of time on the development of theoretical knowledge having almost no time left to actually make music or allow for creativity. Considering the importance of creativity on the one hand, and the lack of creativity development in most of the current school systems, this paper tries to explore the following research question:

What is the role of creativity in music classroom education?
In order to answer the research question, the following sub questions were phrased:

1. What is creativity and what is its role in art creation?
2. Which aspects influence the development of creativity?
3. How can music teachers stimulate the development of creativity?
4. To which extent, do teachers appreciate creative personality traits of their students?

The paper is divided into three chapters: The first chapter draws on existing research to explore creativity, its role in art creation, and creativity development as relevant for classroom teaching. The second chapter explores to which extent music teachers appreciate creative personality traits in the classroom using a descriptive field study. In the third chapter, the results will be summarized and discussed. This paper aims at helping music teachers to effectively integrate creativity development in their lessons.

Orientation on the topic

My initial aim was to find out how to organize musical learning in the classroom more efficiently. While gathering information on that topic I found other important aspects, which are involved in musical learning such as the students’ motivation and creativity. Further research brought to my attention that the development of creativity might be a key aspect in art and thus music education. As I got the impression that creativity is a term that is often used but never clearly defined among music teachers, I decided to further explore the role of creativity in music classroom education.
Chapter I – Literature study on creativity as relevant for music classroom education

1.1 Method of literature study

To get a general overview of creativity, I studied articles on current creativity research using the online database of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. I searched with the keywords “creativity”, “classroom education”, “music education”, “assessment” and “motivation”. In addition, I consulted encyclopedias and read several books and journals about creativity, creativity development and creativity in education, which were all based on scientific research. I always tried to work with up-to-date sources. Older sources were mainly used for general theories about creativity whereas newer sources were mainly used to explore current empirical findings.

1.2. What is creativity and what is its role in art creation?

To determine the role of creativity in classroom education, it is important to clarify the definition and the role of creativity in education and art creation. It seems that there are various opinions on how to define creativity. According to Mumford (2003) the summary of research about creativity suggests that there is at least a general agreement over the last decade that creativity involves the production of novel, useful products. Beyond this smallest common denominator, there are hundreds of different definitions of creativity (Meusburger, 2009), a few of which are outlined below.

Definitions of creativity

Ken Robinson, a leading figure in today’s Arts Education, defines creativity as “imaginative processes that produce outcomes that are original and of value” (Robinson, 2001, p. 118). According to his definition, imaginative processes enable human beings to call to mind people, events, feelings and experiences that are not present. These hypothetical mental representations include possibilities that are composed in the mind rather than recalled, such as imagining a green polar bear wearing a pink dress. However, while creative processes are rooted in imaginative thought, they have to be applied to the external world. If they remain internal mental processes they are not considered to be creative. Robinson (2001), Craft and Leibling (2001) suggest that there has to be originality involved in the creative process and that originality is to be divided into different kinds of originality. Craft and Leibling (2001) use the term “little C” to describe creativity that is original to the person and thus refers to the fact that the creative outcome is new and original to the person no matter how many other people have created the same thing before. The term “big C” describes creativity that is original for humanity as a whole (think of Mozart’s compositions or other produced works of towering figures of science, the arts and technology) and thus
refers to groundbreaking inventions that are new to humanity as a whole. In conclusion, Ken Robinson’s and Craft and Leibling’s definition comprises the keywords imagination, originality and value.

Glück et al. (2002) asked artists, who daily face the act of being creative, to define creativity and grouped the answers into the following five categories: imagination, value, problem solving, ego and labor. While the respondents agreed on the importance of imaginative aspects (such as intuition) in creative processes and the value a creative work needs to have for society, they augmented the definitions by keywords such as problem solving, ego and labor. Glück describes problem solving as the process of realizing creative ideas within a given framework and as encompassing more cognitive aspects than imagination. Ego refers to the individual (positive) feelings during the creative process whereas labor describes the fact that creativity requires a lot of hard work and effort.

To address the lack of a standardized definition of the term creativity Plucker and colleagues (2004) compared ninety scientific articles, which either explicitly or implicitly defined creativity. Subsequently, they generated a synthesized definition which will serve as the definition of creativity in this paper: “Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context” (Plucker, 2004, p. 90).

The role of creativity in art creation

Glück et al.’s (2002) definition of creativity is derived from answers of artists, who described the process of creating an artistic product. Thus, creativity seems to play an important role in art creation. To clarify the role of creativity in art creation, it could be helpful to look at creativity in a broader context. According to recent theorists, everyone has the potential to be creative (Runco, 2007), which can be explained in different ways. From the evolutionary perspective it could be argued that basic characteristics of creativity are necessary to adapt to environmental changes in order to survive and they are therefore innate skills. Throughout history, creativity has not only proven to be a survival skill in evolution but has also contributed to social progress and fundamental changes in the arts through “big C” inventions. Creative inventions (such as the invention of electricity, the computer, new instruments, new composing techniques, etc.) have had significant impact on the way contemporary society is structured and can be considered a driving force in art creation.

1.3. Which aspects influence the development of creativity?

As creativity is a very complex concept, there are many aspects, which influence the development of creativity. These aspects can be divided into the 4 P’s (Kaufmann et al., 2008): the creative person, the creative press (referring to the environment), the creative process, and the creative product. These categories interact with each other and are often
difficult to distinguish (Figure 1). In the following paragraphs, some aspects from each category will be described.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1: The 4 P’s in creativity research: Person, press, process and product.**

1.3.1. The person

The category “person” consists of many diverse aspects, which are associated with the creative person such as imaginative thought, creative skills, creative personality traits and intrinsic motivation which will be described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

*Imaginative thought*

Ken Robinson’s definition of creativity emphasizes that the source of creativity is always the imaginative thought, which should be conceived of as developing throughout childhood and continuing on into adulthood (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). Similarly, Vygotsky (2004) states that the essential task of education is to create a stimulating environment, in which children are encouraged to think imaginatively and learn to have faith and confidence in their creative imaginations. According to Vygotsky’s theories of imagination, it is important to provide children with opportunities to experience new things, draw upon the experiences of others, and to be allowed many opportunities to create materials that embody their imaginative thoughts. By nurturing students’ imaginative thinking, educators are preparing students to become problem-solvers and creative thinkers who have the capabilities to explore complex problems and issues in innovative ways.

*Creative skills and personality traits*

According to Amabile’s (1982) componential theory, creative people need domain-relevant skills including knowledge, technical skills, and specialized talents in the particular
domain in order to be creative in that particular domain. In addition, the key tasks of teaching for creativity involves to encourage children to use their creative talents in order to build self-esteem and confidence, which in turn will stimulate their creativity (NACCCE, 1999). The encouragement of personal characteristics, that are associated with creativity like risk-taking, independent judgment, commitment and determination will contribute to the development of the students’ creative potential. This aspect will be explored in more detail in chapter II (p. 15).

*Intrinsic Task Motivation*

Another important component of creativity refers to a person’s motivation concerning the task. To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) people have not only different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation. In general, one distinguishes between *intrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable, and *extrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Amabile, 1999). Intrinsic motivation will be listed in the category “person” because it refers to the person’s individual interests. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, will be listed in the category “press” as it is associated with external factors.

Research has shown that the quality of experience and performance vary depending on whether motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic, with intrinsic motivation resulting in high-quality learning and creativity. As a result, it is important to consider the factors, which increase or decrease intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and a number of studies have sought to do so. For example, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) focuses specifically on social and environmental factors that facilitate or undermine intrinsic motivation. The Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) by Deci and Ryan (1985), which is a sub-theory of the SDT, stresses the importance of interpersonal events (such as rewards and feedback) that can produce feelings of competence during an activity. Feelings of competence enhance the intrinsic motivation for an activity because they allow satisfaction of the basic need for competence. Positive feedback and freedom of punishing evaluations predict thus, to facilitate intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A lack of feedback or fear of punishment can in turn undermine intrinsic motivation. However, the feelings of competence will not enhance intrinsic motivation unless they are accompanied by a *sense of autonomy* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, people must not only experience perceived competence, they must also experience their behavior to be self-determined. This can be problematic in a classroom situation, in which students easily might lose the feeling of being self-determined.
1.3.2. The press (environment)

The press refers to external factors that influence creativity. The following paragraphs will describe two important external aspects in creativity development: extrinsic motivation and social influences on creativity in the classroom.

*Extrinsic task motivation*

As many tasks that teachers want their students to perform are not inherently interesting, students might rarely be intrinsically motivated to participate in class. It is therefore important to promote certain forms of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In order to accomplish successful learning and teaching, it is necessary to turn extrinsic motivations into autonomous, or self-determined, forms of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, a student, who does the homework because he personally believes it is valuable for his career, does this for its instrumental value rather than because he enjoys the work. However, a student who does his homework only because he fears parental sanctions is extrinsically motivated because he is doing the work in order to attain the separable outcome of avoiding sanctions. Although both examples represent extrinsic motivational behavior, the first example includes personal engagement and a feeling of choice, whereas the second example involves external control (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In order to turn the students’ motivation into self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation, students need to identify with the goal of the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Identification describes the process in which a person has identified with the personal importance of a behavior and has thus accepted its regulation as his or her own. A student who memorizes spelling lists because he sees it as relevant to writing, which he values as a life goal, has identified with the value of this learning activity. Identification is still classified as extrinsic motivation, because the goals that are trying to be achieved are still for reasons extrinsic to the self, rather than the inherent enjoyment or interest in the task. However, identification is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. In summary, the kind of motivation plays an important role as motivation that is based on the concepts of self-determination and feelings of competence lead to high-quality learning and creativity.

*Social influences on creativity in the classroom*

There is an increasing amount of literature that highlights the impact that external factors such as peer groups, listening history, family environment and musical preferences have upon the development of musical creativity (MacDonald, 2006). For example, the study of MacDonald, Miell and Morgan (2002) and Miell and MacDonald (2000) dealt with social impacts on composition processes. According to their study, the social variable friendship impacts upon both the processes and outcomes of pupils’ collaborative compositions. They found out, that children who had worked with their best friends produced compositions that
were rated superior to those children who had worked with only an acquaintance. In summary, research has shown that social factors have impact upon musical creativity.

1.3.3. The process (flow)

The creative process is the actual experience of being creative (Kaufmann et al., 2008). Researchers have found that optimal performance in the field of artistic creativity (as well as in the fields of teaching and learning) is positively correlated with the achievement of a mental state called flow (Csikszentmihályi et al., 1992). According to Csikszentmihályi (1991) flow is the optimal state of intrinsic motivation, where a person is fully absorbed by what he or she is doing. This state of mind is characterized by complete focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. The theoretical construct of flow as introduced and developed by Csikszentmihályi has become a well-recognized area of the study of creativity.

It is impossible to predict precisely when one is going to enter flow. Although it is most likely to occur when one is wholeheartedly performing a task or activity for intrinsic purposes, there are, however, certain conditions, as outlined by Csikszentmihályi (1992), which are necessary to achieve flow in an activity. Firstly, it has to be ensured that there is no worry of failure in the activity. Secondly, clear task goals have to be provided at every step of the way in order to add direction and structure to the task. Thirdly, instant feedback on the performance has to be ensured during the activity to help the person to adjust his or her performance to any changing demands and to maintain the flow state. Fourthly, and maybe most importantly, a balance must be struck between the challenge of the task and the skill of the performer. If a task is too difficult, the performer will become anxious, if a task is too easy, the performer will get bored. In both cases flow cannot occur (Figure 2).

According to a multi-year study of student experiences led by Csikszentmihályi and psychologist Kevin Rathunde, students in Montessori settings achieved flow experiences more frequently than other students. This seemed to be due to the principles and practices of the Montessori method of education that purposefully sets up continuous flow opportunities and experiences for students (Shernoff & Csikszentmihályi, 2009).
1.3.4. The product

Most research gathered in the category “product” deals with assessment strategies of creativity and of creative products. As there are many different theories about how to measure and to evaluate creativity or the creativeness of products this paper will focus on two examples of assessment strategies in creativity research; on the one hand, this paragraph will describe the Divergent Thinking Tests, which test a skill called divergent thinking. On the other hand, the Consensual Assessment Technique will be described, which is used to assess the creativeness of a product. Both assessment techniques might be interesting for music teachers, as they might want to assess the students’ creativity or the creativeness of a musical product.

Divergent Thinking Tests

There are several ways to test creativity. Most of the tests measure abilities that are important for creative performance, but it is unclear whether they are useful for directly assessing something called creativity (Amabile, 1982). According to Guilford (1968), divergent-thinking is the most significant category in creative thinking and invention. Torrance (1970) placed the teaching of divergent thinking firmly within his conceptualization of creative teaching. The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) for example, is one of several creativity tests that consist of verbal tests, consequences tests, imaginative stories, and other tests, which focus on a skill called divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is a way of thinking that moves away in diverging direction in order to involve a variety of aspects and which sometimes lead to novel ideas and solutions. Oftentimes, divergent thinking is contrasted with convergent thinking, which brings together information focused on solving a problem. Mostly these problems only have one correct solution (Kaufmann et al., 2008). Divergent thinking tests therefore require individuals to produce several responses to a specific question, in sharp contrast to most standardized tests of achievement or ability that require one correct answer.

The Consensual Assessment Technique

Creative products can be assessed with the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT). This procedure does not make use of checklists and does not apply a general creativity-assessment rubric. The theory on which the CAT is based is that the best judgments of the creativity of artifacts are the combined opinions of experts in the field (Kaufmann, Plucker, & Baer, 2008). Although these opinions might be imperfect, the reason why this method has been used extensively in creativity research is because it is (a) based on actual creative performances or products; (b) it is not tied to any particular theory of creativity; and (c) it mimics the way creativity is assessed in the “real world”. The CAT has sometimes been called the “gold standard” of creativity assessment (Carson, 2006).
1.4. How can teachers stimulate the development of creativity?

According to Vygotsky, “the best stimulus of creativity in children is to organize their life and environment so that it leads to the need and ability to create” (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 66). The following paragraph will give examples of how teachers can stimulate creativity in the classroom by applying some of the aspects described in paragraph 1.3. (p. 7).

**Imaginative thought**

As creativity involves imaginative thinking, teachers have to stimulate students to think imaginatively and to create materials that embody their imaginative thoughts (Vygotsky, 2004). In music education this could be realized by letting students compose or improvise. There are, however, other musical tasks such as listening, which could be offered in a creative way. Webster (1989) describes creative listening tasks, which aim to stimulate divergent thinking. According to Webster (1989) a creative listening task could for example be to listen to a music example (the opening section from Schubert’s Symphony No. 5 in B flat) and to describe the different ways you think the main motif could be used in the music. This task stimulates divergent thinking, which is essential to creativity. Another possible task could be to play two different themes and to ask the students to compose a connecting bridge. In that way, students would be challenged to use their imagination and to make a creative product.

**Creative skills**

Everybody needs domain-relevant skills in order to be creative in a certain domain (Amabile, 1982). Therefore, music teachers still need to teach the basic technical, theoretical and musical skills that are needed in order to accomplish a certain task. Students with no musical pre-knowledge cannot be expected to be musically creative.

**Personality traits**

Creativity implies certain personality traits. Therefore, teachers should aim to encourage these characteristics. This aspect will be further explored in chapter II of this paper (p.14).

**Social influences**

According to the study of MacDonald, Miell and Morgan (2002) and Miell and MacDonald (2000) social factors such as friendship have impact upon musical creativity. They found out that children who had worked with their best friends produced compositions that were rated superior to those children who had worked with only an acquaintance. Therefore, teachers stimulate creativity when letting students work with their best friends.

**Flow**

According to Csikszentmihályi et al. (1992), there seems to be a correlation between flow and creativity. To obtain the flow state, students need to be motivated. It is therefore important to make an effort to stimulate positive forms of motivation in students. Positive
forms of motivation can be achieved by turning students’ extrinsic motivation into autonomous, or self-determined, forms of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This could be achieved by emphasizing in which way the students profit from a certain task or by outlining the advantages they might have when learning something. Students also need to have a feeling of competence during the task, which could be achieved by giving positive feedback. In addition, students need the feeling of being self-determined. Letting students choose between different tasks might attain this.

Chapter II – Field study

As mentioned in Chapter I (p. 9) of this paper, it is important for students to develop certain personality traits in order to develop their creativity. One of the most consistent findings in educational studies of creativity, however, has been that teachers dislike personality traits associated with creativity (Westby & Dawson, 1995). The characteristics associated with creativity according to MacKinnon (1963) include determination, independence, and individualism. Sternberg (1985) added impulsivity and risk-taking to the list. These characteristics may not be the most positively viewed characteristics of students in a classroom setting where the teacher tries to maintain order and attend to multiple children. According to MacKinnon’s (1963) study the labels responsible, sincere, reliable, dependable, clear-thinking, tolerant, understanding, peaceable, good-natured, moderate, steady, practical and logical were found to be associated with the lowest levels of creativity. These characteristics seem well suited to the traditional classroom. As one would expect creativity to be generally welcome in music classroom education, this paper aims at exploring to which extent music teachers in the Northern Netherlands value creative personality traits of their students.

Research question
To which extent do music teachers appreciate creative personality traits of their students?

2.1. Methods
To explore in which way music teachers value certain personality traits in classroom music education, I developed an online inquiry consisting of 49 questions. Westby and Dawson’s (1995) categorization of personality traits into creative and non-creative characteristics was used in the inquiry of the present study; in their study “Creativity: Asset or Burden in the Classroom?” Westby and Dawson explored in which way elementary school teachers valued personality traits associated with creativity in the classroom. They assigned personality traits to two distinct categories: Extremely uncharacteristic for a creative person and extremely characteristic for a creative person.
All public secondary schools in the northern Dutch provinces Groningen, Drenthe, Friesland and Overijssel were called and asked for permission to approach their music teachers with an inquiry. Accordingly, these music teachers were approached by email with the question whether they wanted to participate in a field study by filling in an online inquiry. They were asked to reply if they agreed on participating. Teachers who agreed on participating received an email containing a link, which lead them to the online inquiry. In the inquiry, the teachers were asked to indicate their appreciation of certain personality traits of their students on a 5-point-scale ranging from 1 (not appreciated at all) to 5 (highly appreciated). The personality traits were categorized into Westby and Dawson’s categories of extremely uncharacteristic for a creative person and extremely characteristic for a creative person. The teachers filling in the inquiry, however, were neither aware of the structure of the inquiry nor of the fact that the personality traits or the inquiry were linked to creativity. Afterwards, the teachers were asked to picture a student (preferably a vwo/havo 3 or 4 student) they prefer in the classroom setting and to characterize this student by the means of the same inquiry. This procedure was set up in order to compare whether the personality traits that were consciously appreciated highly were related to the character of the teacher’s favorite student. This procedure was used in order to prevent social desirable answers. The questionnaire consisted thus of four scales: the teachers’ evaluation of creative characteristics, the teachers’ evaluation of non-creative characteristics, the creative characteristics of the teachers’ favorite student and the non-creative characteristics of the teachers’ favorite student.

Subsequently, the teachers were asked to indicate their opinion on the development of creativity in classroom education and if they regularly made effort to develop their students’ creativity. In addition, they were asked if they knew how to develop creativity and if they would like to know more about developing creativity. The inquiry ended with questions concerning the teachers’ age, work experience and province in which they were working. The results were analyzed in order to explore the following questions:

1) To which extent, do music teachers generally prefer personality traits that are associated with creative students compared to personality traits that are not associated with creative students?
2) Is there a correlation between the personality traits that teachers generally value and the personality traits of their favorite student?
Question 1
To which extent, do music teachers generally prefer personality traits that are associated with creative students compared to personality traits that are not associated with creative students?

Data analysis
In order to explore question 1, the teachers’ answers were translated into percentages. Afterwards, I added up the percentages of the two highest scores (4 and 5 → highly appreciated) and of the two lowest scores (1 and 2 → not appreciated at all). This should indicate the popularity/unpopularity of certain characteristics among the questioned teachers. After that, I added up these percentages once for the creative characteristics and once for the non-creative characteristics and divided the sum by the number of creative/non-creative characteristics in order to get an average percentage for both creative and non-creative characteristics. Afterwards, I looked at the percentage answers given on the middle score (3 → in between highly appreciated and not appreciated at all). These answers were evaluated as being neutral.

2.2. Results – question 1
In the following description of the results, I will refer to personality traits associated with creativity with the term “creative characteristics” and to personality traits not associated with creativity with the term “non-creative characteristics”.

Out of the 65 music teachers who were approached, 41 agreed to fill in the online inquiry. A total of 36 of the 65 teachers actually filled in the online inquiry (response rate 53.7 %). The results showed that non-creative characteristics (Figure 3) were appreciated by an average of 90.2 % of the polled music teachers. Seven out of the ten non-creative characteristics were even rated as highly appreciated by 90 % or more of the teachers. Almost none of the teachers stated to not appreciate non-creative characteristics. A total of 7 items were rated neutrally by 8 % or less of the teachers. The characteristic logical was rated neutrally by 25 % of the teachers.
In comparison, the creative characteristics were appreciated by an average of only 57% of the music teachers (Figure 4) and the creative characteristic non-conformity was even only valued by 6% of the teachers. While almost none of the teachers stated to not appreciate the non-creative characteristics (Figure 3), an average of 15% of the teachers, however, stated to not appreciate certain creative characteristics at all: Creative personality traits such as impulsiveness, non-conformity and the item “Likes to be alone when creating something new” were valued by less than 34% of the teachers. A total of 61% of the teachers stated not to appreciate the creative characteristic non-conformity. Some of the creative characteristics such as the items likes to be alone when creating something new and tends not to know own limitations and tries to do what others think is impossible were rated neutrally by 42% of the teachers. The creative item impulsiveness was rated neutrally by 61% of the teachers. However, there were certain creative characteristics, that were highly valued by the teachers, such as progressiveness, emotionality, risk-taking behavior and making up the rules as he or she goes along. A total of 76% or more of the teachers highly appreciated those characteristics. Teachers seem to overall like non-creative characteristics whereas the creative characteristics were appreciated to very divergent degrees.
2.3. Results – question 2

Is there a correlation between the personality traits that teachers generally value and the personality traits of their favorite student?

Data analysis

In order to explore question 2, the teachers’ answers considering the appreciation of creative characteristics were compared to the creative characteristics of one of their favorite students. To compare the answers, the mean was calculated group wise for both scales (Figures 5a and 5b). Afterwards, the correlation of the means of the creative characteristics (c) and the student’s creative characteristics (sc) scales was calculated (Figure 6a) as well as the correlation of the means of the non-creative characteristics (nc) and the student’s non-creative characteristics (snc) scales (Figure 6b).
RESULTS

The results (Figure 5a and 5b) showed that the music teachers valued *creative characteristics* with a mean of 3.6 (Min = 2.5, Max = 4.5, SD = 0.41) (Figure 5a). When describing one of their favorite students, it appeared that music teachers valued *creative characteristics* less (M = 3.22) (Min = 2.1, Max = 4.5, SD = 0.45) (Figure 5b).

Figure 6a illustrates the linear relationship between the *creativity scale* (c) and the *student’s creativity scale* (sc). Figure 6b illustrates the relationship between the *non-creativity scale* (nc) and the *student’s non-creativity scale* (snc). The results showed that the correlations between the *creativity scale* (c) and the *student’s creativity scale* (sc) (r = .287; p = .09), and between the *non-creativity scale* (nc) and the *student’s non-creativity scale* (snc)
were relatively weak and non-significant. This could suggest that there is no or merely a weak statistical relationship between the teachers’ abstract evaluation of characteristics and their evaluation of characteristics concerning their favorite student. Besides, visual inspection of the scatterplots indicated that teachers generally showed higher appreciation for non-creative characteristics and also rated their favorite students higher on these characteristics. In comparison, their appreciation for creative characteristics was more moderate, as was their evaluation of their favorite students concerning these characteristics.

2.4. Discussion of field study

To which extent do music teachers appreciate creative personality traits in the classroom?

One of the most consistent findings in educational studies of creativity has been that teachers value creative personality traits less than non-creative personality traits (Westby & Dawson, 1995). The present investigation provides an indication that music teachers too seem to overall value creative characteristics less than non-creative characteristics. The investigation demonstrated that the teachers highly appreciated certain creative characteristics, such as solving problems in individual ways and being progressive. Other creative characteristics such as individuality, impulsiveness or nonconformity, on the other hand, seemed not to be appreciated very much. As teachers’ expectations of students have significant impact on students’ grades and performance (Brophy & Good, 1970), it is important to seek clarification of the reason why teachers value certain creative personality traits less than non-creative personality traits. One possible reason could be the fact that teachers need to be able to maintain order in the class and to attend to multiple students. Creative characteristics such as impulsiveness, individuality, nonconformity and risk taking behavior could make this very difficult.

Moreover, the results of question 2 of the field study showed that the music teachers appreciated creative characteristics on an abstract level but had a more negative view of creative characteristics when it concerned their favorite student. This could indicate that the teachers gave social desirable answers when asked to generally evaluate the characteristics. However, it could indicate that teachers generally want to appreciate these characteristics, but that these characteristics lead to disturbances and agitation in the classroom. This would in turn suggest that the music classroom is an inhospitable environment for creative children. Further research should examine the impact of factors such as class size on teachers’ appreciation of creative characteristics.

Some of the creative characteristics such as impulsiveness and the items likes to be alone when creating something new and tends not to know own limitations and tries to do what others think is impossible were rated neutrally by a considerable number of teachers. This could indicate that there are music classroom situations in which these characteristics are
appreciated and situations where they are rather not appreciated. Further research could explore in which way teachers can structure their lessons in order to give students with these characteristics a chance to develop. This could prevent that students with creative characteristics are being neglected or excluded in the classroom.

Due to the amount of participants in the field study, the degree to which these findings generalize to other populations is an issue that should be further explored. In addition, the inquiry of the present field study used the categorization of personality traits of the study “Creativity: Asset or Burden in the Classroom?” by Westby and Dawson (1995), which was written in English. In order to interrogate music teachers in the Northern Netherlands, the creative and non-creative personality traits were translated from English to Dutch. Online dictionaries and an English native speaker were consulted in order to properly translate the characteristics. The question is whether the translated characteristics equal the English characteristics e.g. concerning positive and negative connotations. The translation might have influenced the way teachers rated the characteristics. Furthermore, the degree to which these personality traits are valid to indicate creativity should be further explored.

With these caveats in mind, the current research suggests that potentially creative children may be at risk for being rejected by the teacher in the music classroom. Given that research has suggested that a supportive environment is important in fostering creativity, the consequences of a teacher’s rejection may be a decrease in creative performance and an alienation from music class on the part of the student. Some of the most creative students may remain unrecognized or may even be punished.

Chapter III – General conclusions and discussion

3.1. General conclusions and discussion

What is the role of creativity in music classroom education?

The literature study has shown that creativity is important for social, individual and artistic development and that creativity can be seen as a driving force in art creation and as an essential element in music education. Besides, the literature study demonstrated that a supportive environment is important in fostering creativity. This means that the environment needs to stimulate the students’ creative characteristics and imagination. Moreover, students need to be positively motivated and have a nurturing social environment in order to be creative.

According to the present field study, it seems that the music classroom provides an inhospitable environment for creative students, as music teachers seem to have a more negative view of certain creative characteristics than of non-creative characteristics. As the development of creative personality traits constitutes only one important aspect in creativity
development, the question is whether schools, and thus the music classrooms, provide inhospitable environments for creativity development concerning other important aspects. Firstly, the fact that most school systems educate according to traditional academic criteria leads to a one-sided development of convergent thinking and a negligence of divergent thinking skills which are essential for imaginative thinking and thus creativity.

In addition, students are mostly obliged to attend school and they have little choice considering their selection of subjects. Given that the preconditions for positive motivation are composed of feelings of choice and feelings of competence, it becomes clear that the very basic structure of schools makes it difficult for students to feel they have a choice. Students who are creatively talented and struggle with analytical approaches of learning will rarely get the chance to experience feelings of competence and will subsequently become highly unmotivated.

According to MacDonald (2006), musical creativity is influenced by social factors such as peer groups and friendship, which brings up another important point of discussion; students in traditional school systems are classified by age and not by the students’ interests or by social factors such as friendship. This could increase the risk of not providing a nurturing social environment for the development of creativity.

Although there seems to be a broad consensus regarding the importance of creativity for social, individual and artistic development, current school systems seem to provide an inhospitable environment for creative students concerning all essential aspects of creativity development. As in music classroom education, a more creative and practical approach will lead away from a musicological approach, which may create a better balance between the analytical and creative aspects of music classroom education. Music teachers who want to establish the preconditions for creativity development will be confronted with problems resulting from the school system’s inhospitable environment. However, teachers could try to stimulate creativity within the given school system by following some of the recommendations mentioned in chapter 1.4. (p. 13).

The knowledge gained in the present study emphasizes the importance of creativity for the art subjects, and especially for music, but could probably be transferred to other subjects as well. It could be interesting to explore the role of creativity in other subjects and to examine whether teachers of those subjects prefer non-creative characteristics to creative characteristics as well. However, the degree to which creativity generally should be prioritized in school systems should further be examined as the development of creativity might have consequences for society that might not be desirable. Given the assumption that creativity is associated with impulsiveness, individualism, non-conformity and risk-taking behavior the question is, whether society would profit by an increasing amount of people with highly developed creative skills. Society will still need people who are willing to take orders,
adapt themselves and prevent that high risk is taken. As for music classroom education, a school system, which provides a more supportive environment for creativity development would be of great value.

3.2. Evaluation

The most time consuming aspect of this study was the phrasing and thus the containment of the research question, as the field of interest (motivation, learning, creativity) was very broad to begin with. As soon as the research question was phrased, the literature study and the practical study followed without long interruptions or phases of lacking inspiration. Initially, I was afraid that the response rate for my inquiry would not be sufficient for an exploratory study but the teachers I approached were willing to cooperate and generally very interested. Unfortunately, I did not have enough statistical knowledge to evaluate the received answers appropriately. Therefore, only general tendencies were considered in the result section of my field study. Further research should be conducted to value and reanalyze the present data using appropriate statistical procedures.
References


NACCCE (1999). All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education.
Appendix

1) Online inquiry:
https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dEtBeXhGN2VMcHJNcXdfNWRzZ1ZHUGc6MA

2) Summary of results