

〈論文〉

Critical Reflection in Creative Learning: Exploring Narratives on Composition

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1. Introduction

There is growing recognition of the importance of exploring the relationship between creative thinking and narrative activities in the educational sphere. This paper focuses on students' experience of creative processes: what they are going through when producing creative works and how the process is articulated, generated and constructed in their interactive narratives. By examining some of the students' discussion threads on composition, I present how reflections on creativity enrich one's narratives and narrative-construction in turn enhances one's creativity. The paper concludes the role of critical reflection in supporting creative learning.

John Dewey states, "give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results" (John Dewey, 1916. P.191). This idea strongly supports current approaches in education which praise an active learning as opposed to a passive learning. It is easily misunderstood, however, that an active learning means merely by doing "it," or "experiencing "it." While that might be an initial step toward an active learning, what Dewey means, however, is that we learn by thinking and not just thinking but thinking deeply. Deep thinking is possible, I argue, through critical reflection and narrative construction. Dewey considers aesthetic experience involves "living in the experience of making and perceiving" (1934/1980, p.33). This statement possibly suggest that what makes us perceive our experience is a critical reflection.

In this paper, I examine the discussion threads which take place one of the online courses on music composition in a college education in the United States. I investigate how reflection on assumptions and behavior is an important aspect of learning that can create a shift in perspective, a change in consciousness, or a transformation of mind. We will see the ways in which engaging

in reflection and reflective practices enhance learners' own growth and their capacities to facilitate future learning. When learners engage in reflection, they become aware of their own behaviors and assumptions and of their own understanding of who they are and what they want to do. Because reflection concerns one's thoughts, it can be personal, critical and creative.

2. Discussion Activities

The research employs a qualitative analysis and narrative inquires on students' comments posted in discussion. The focus of the investigation are as follows: what kind of experience do students express in relation to creative and compositional activities and what kinds of meaning do these experiences carry in their lives as artists. Hence, the experiences on creation in each learners' life are described as narratives (Clandinin, 2000, 2007, 2018, Connelly, 1990).

A week later after the course begins, students who are learning musical composition were asked to watch the interviews of the composers and to answer several questions such as how they began a composition and how they chose their materials. They discussed this with their classmates and shared their ideas and thoughts with the class by posting to the discussion thread and replying to classmates.

In recorded interviews, composers were chosen by the course instructor and interviews were presented in the video format. The first composer interviewed says she usually begins a composition by, first of all, knowing in advance what instruments she is going to be writing for and most of the time knowing who the performers are, their abilities and their personalities. Then she enters into the sound world that starts to present itself. What doesn't work for her is to set at her desk or at the piano and try to compose. She needs to find ways to generate ideas about the sound world in her imagination before she sits down to write things down. She walks around a lot, around her apartment, walks to and from school, devoting herself to the thought process of thinking about the instruments and the kind of piece she wants to write. Most of the time something suggests itself very clearly. It's usually not melodic or conventionally harmonic. It's usually a sound. Then what she has to do is try to craft the formal shape of the piece and the pitch language and all that from this sonic imagination she has.

The second composer said he likes having an assignment. The more information he has about what is needed, the better off he is. Working on a piece of film or TV music, he starts with a picture and lets the picture tell him what is needed. It is hard for him to just sit down one day and say, he thinks he will write something today. He wouldn't really know exactly what to do. When he

has written songs for pop music, film and TV, he usually tries to have an idea of what kind of song he needs, what sort of tempo he might need. He likes to have a purpose in mind, and he thinks that helps him. He is a practical writer. He wants to write something that's going to have some use to somebody.

The third composer interviewed says the way she composes has changed. Early on in her writing, because she was in love with harmony and chords, she always started with a set of chords and it grew. Then she erected the structure of the song on top of that and used it as a foundation. Now she tends to start with a lyric idea. There are reasons in terms of where you start a song, it changes the kind of song that you write. It puts one thing into focus in the song, and then everything else has to be constructed around that focus. She has gone through all of the different approach. She writes from melody for a while, but she finds that writing from the lyric is the best way to focus the song and then creating the music around it to support the meaning. That works best for her now.

3. Reflective Activities

On composers on composing, the first thread discussion started. The student A initiates that she agrees with the first composer on her need for dedicated time (walking) to focus her thoughts on the musical idea she is wanting to create. She finds that the creative flow is always much more pronounced when she is intentionally being reflective. The second composer needs to have a purpose and idea of the framework before he begins to compose. It's definitely a challenge to begin writing without an idea of the kind of song, the melodic idea, or the message you want to convey. Having a purpose behind what she is writing is an important step in her creative process. She continues to sum up by saying what the third composer talked about, namely how her process has changed over the years. The third composer used to begin with the chords and harmonic phrases and built on top of that. Early on, she feels like this is where a lot of composers begin. When she learns theory, a lot of analysis and stress is placed on the chords, so naturally when beginning to compose, it seems easiest to start with a chord progression and add layers on top of that. Once you've grasped the chords and harmonies, you can flip and begin to think of a melody or lyrical line first, next fit the chords in around that melody. In her opinion, it depends on the piece of music, sometimes, the melody for her doesn't come in until later in the piece.

The student B follows the student A by responding that he is the same way with his songwriting. He seems to take all of their methods and combine them. He does not have one process he sticks to every time. Ideas can come from anywhere. Following the student B, the

student C joins, stating that he agrees with the student A as well. There really isn't a set method every time. He agrees with the student B, too. Ideas can spring up out of nowhere anytime. The one thing he struggles with a bit sometimes is should he start with melody or harmony first. He guesses it depends on the ideas that come first.

The first discussion thread shows that the exchange of the opinions takes place as a form of personal response to compositional experiences or situations. Before one begins to assess the words and ideas of others, one needs to pause, identify and examine one's own thoughts. Doing this involves revisiting one's prior experience on composition. It also involves considering how and why one thinks the way one does. Comments are sometimes descriptive but not pure description. They outline and document what something is so. Because very often students write using personal pronouns like "I," "my," or "we," comments are personal and expressive. Furthermore, the ways in which discussion develops is analytical and explanatory as well. Using descriptive, expressive and analytical modes, students draw related ideas on branches that radiate from the central theme.

Starting the second thread, the student C begins by saying that he really agreed with the first and the second composers' processes for composing. It's always nice to have the scene you are composing for but sometimes we don't. Sometimes when the director/writer describes a scene to him he will try to imagine it best he can and like the first composer says, sometimes he will go for a walk and think of what instruments he will be writing for. Which will best convey the mood or emotion/feeling. He agrees with Bill as well. He finds it difficult sometimes to just sit at the piano and begin composing. Unless you're a phenomenal improviser, of course, he says.

Then the student B responds to the student C. He also finds it difficult to just sit down and says, "I'm going to write a song today." He tends to find that whenever he tries that, he is less happy with those songs. He almost forced himself to write as opposed to the ones that just came to him naturally. He states, you hear of these bands that say they wrote some of their hits in a matter of minutes, and he never believed it until he started having great inspirations for songs and the words just came right to him. When he thinks about his favorite songs he has written, they have all been spur of the moment ideas.

The student D follows by agreeing with the student C that it is difficult to sit down and just write a song. But sometimes he will do it and months or years later he will revisit his old notebooks if he is looking for ideas - half the time he revisits old material he thinks, hey, that's not bad. In fact, he was listening recently to some of his pieces from the previous class and had the same reaction, so maybe there's something to be said for just producing work so he can access it in the future if

need be.

The second discussion thread suggests that students are having alternative interpretation or different perspectives on what they have read or thought. Listening and watching the interview help students challenge what they already know. Also, the students are actively making comparison and connections between what they are learning, their prior knowledge and experience and their prior assumptions. In constructing new narratives, the students are gaining and reshaping self-knowledge.

The third thread is led by the student B who focuses on the key points and ideas of the three composers' approaches first. The first composer will envision what instruments will be in her piece and who will be playing them, and then factors in their abilities. She needs inspiration to come to her from various different sources such as taking walks, since just sitting at her desk waiting for an idea to come does not work for her. She will then usually have a sound come to mind that paves the way for the more complex parts of the piece. The second composer has a very similar process as the first composer. He is usually unable to sit down and tell himself he is going to write something, and he tends to like having pictures tell a story to him for him to interpret musically. He likes to begin with thinking about the style and tempo of the song and likes his songs to have meaning and a purpose. The third composer used to start with chords and build the rest of the song around that, but more recently has begun her songwriting process with the lyrics in mind first. She believes that starting with the words and topic of the song is the best way to structure the rest of the piece around it.

The student B then describes that his songwriting style can be all over the place, and he tends to use all three of these composers' methods every once in a while. More often than not, he will use both of the third composer's methods. He tends to start writing with the idea for what he wants the song to be about, and he has a melody in his head and he tries to find the guitar chords to match around it, and then he visualizes where the bass, drums, and keys will be. Other times, he will start with a guitar chord progression he came up with, finds the melody and then writes some words that fit with the style.

The student F comments that he likes his approach of visualizing where things will go in terms of instrumentation. He asks the student B if he hears everything at once in this visualization after he comes up with the initial idea is realized or does each part reveal itself to him over time.

The student C joins the third thread, agreeing that he does the same thing with envisioning which instruments will most likely be used. That is probably the first idea he has when he is composing. Usually this is the case with the film cues. Even if the director describes the scene

before he sees it visually, he is already thinking of the textures and instruments he is going to use/ need to create that environment.

We see in the third discussion threads students are trying to achieve clarity when they talk about envisioning and initial ideas. Three students' interaction provides them with an opportunity to understand something they value personally and that is also valued by others. It allows students to create a shared experience and transform individual narratives into communal narratives. A sense of community enhances feelings of purpose.

4. Reflections

The discussion threads explored in this paper shows that discussion bring on not only interaction but also reciprocity. It is highlighted in this regard how important it is for learners and their compositional activities not only to be seen and noted but also take note of other learners' activities and learn from them. Reflective thinking, although it is a part of critical thinking, is a process of "revisiting" experiences and narrative inquiry (Morris, 2002, Polkinghorne, 1988).

It analyzes and makes judgement about what they have been and how they have been. The discussion posts this paper investigated show that reflective thinking is most important in enriching and reconstructing one's narratives.

To express oneself in any artistic form, be it musical composition or producing arts, is confirming and making sense of what one really cares. This paper examined the reflection of student-composers and found out how narrative constructions generated in discussion threads depict the dimensions and important roles that narratives and reflection play in their lives of music making and producing. This enables us to understand how creativity is enhanced in educational spheres. We often think that providing time and space for creation itself is critical. This paper points out that, that is not enough. Creative activities are "experienced," not just by doing activities themselves but also by thinking of them, reflecting upon them. The research indicates that narrative construction and reconstruction in discussion threads or any other communal formats could be utilized more in educational spheres aiming to support student learning. Meaning and meaningfulness are constructed in an interactive reflection process. There is a strong likelihood that creative reflection activities in a encouraging environment broaden and bring new perspective and opportunity to learners' life.

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