

# Learning to be a creative performer: Workshop

**Dr Mirjam James & Dr Karen Wise**

AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as  
Creative Practice

University of Cambridge

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AHRC RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS CREATIVE PRACTICE

# Today's presentation overview

1. Introduction
2. Teacher's concepts of creativity
3. 'Inside the teaching studio'
4. 'Inside the practice room'



# Today's plan

10.00-10.05	Introduction
10.05-10.25	Teachers' concepts of creativity
10.25-10.45	Discussion
<b>10.45-11.00</b>	<b>Break</b>
11.00-11.20	'Inside the teaching studio'
11.20-11.35	Discussion
11.35-11.55	'Inside the practice room'
11.55-12.15	Discussion
12.15-12.30	Implications/Action points
<b>12.30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>



# Creative learning and “original” musical performance

- One of five projects in AHRC Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP)
- 3-year project in collaboration with Royal College of Music and Guildhall School of Music and Drama, led by Professor John Rink
- Focuses on creativity and creative learning in a conservatoire environment:
  - Concepts of creativity (students and staff)
  - Creative practices (teaching and learning)
  - Creative development (students)
- Methodological approaches are mixed (quantitative and qualitative) with a psychology basis
- Largely qualitative phenomenological approach



# Background: Creativity

➤ Generally no 'single' creativity – creativity can be conceptualised through four different categories: *person, product, process* and *press* (Rhodes, 1961, Runco, 2004)

**Person:** refers to intra-individual factors such as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011; Tierney & Farmer, 2002, 2011, Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994)

**Product:** different types of creativity, depending on the level of novelty a product or idea may have within a given culture (Boden, 1992)

**Process:** developmental aspects of creativity (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007)

**Press (Environment):** refers to external influences such as cultural or social constraints (Glück, Ernst, & Unger, 2002; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988)



# Background: Creativity in musical performance

- Performance as one of many activities that is included in frameworks of musical creativity (Leman, 1999)
  - Research mainly focuses on the processes of creating new musical material as in compositions and improvisations (Sawyer, 2003, Deliège & Wiggins, 2006; Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007 (p; 127-144), Kleinen, 2003 Rosenbrock, 2005)
- it becomes ‘a matter of huge personal significance, even financial survival’ (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007, p.85)



# Project overview: Major studies

- Student cohort questionnaire 1
- Focus groups interviews: Teachers' concepts of creativity
- Observation 1: 'Inside the teaching studio'
  - Video observation + video recall
- Observation 2: 'Inside the practice room'
  - Video observation + video recall
  - Practice diaries
  - Performances
  - Pre- and post-performance questionnaires
- Student cohort questionnaire 2

# Teachers' concept of creativity



# Focus groups

## Aim:

- To understand teachers' constructs of creativity and originality by:
  - Examining teachers' discourses and beliefs around being creative as a classical performer
  - Examining teachers' discourses and beliefs around the teaching and learning of creativity in performance

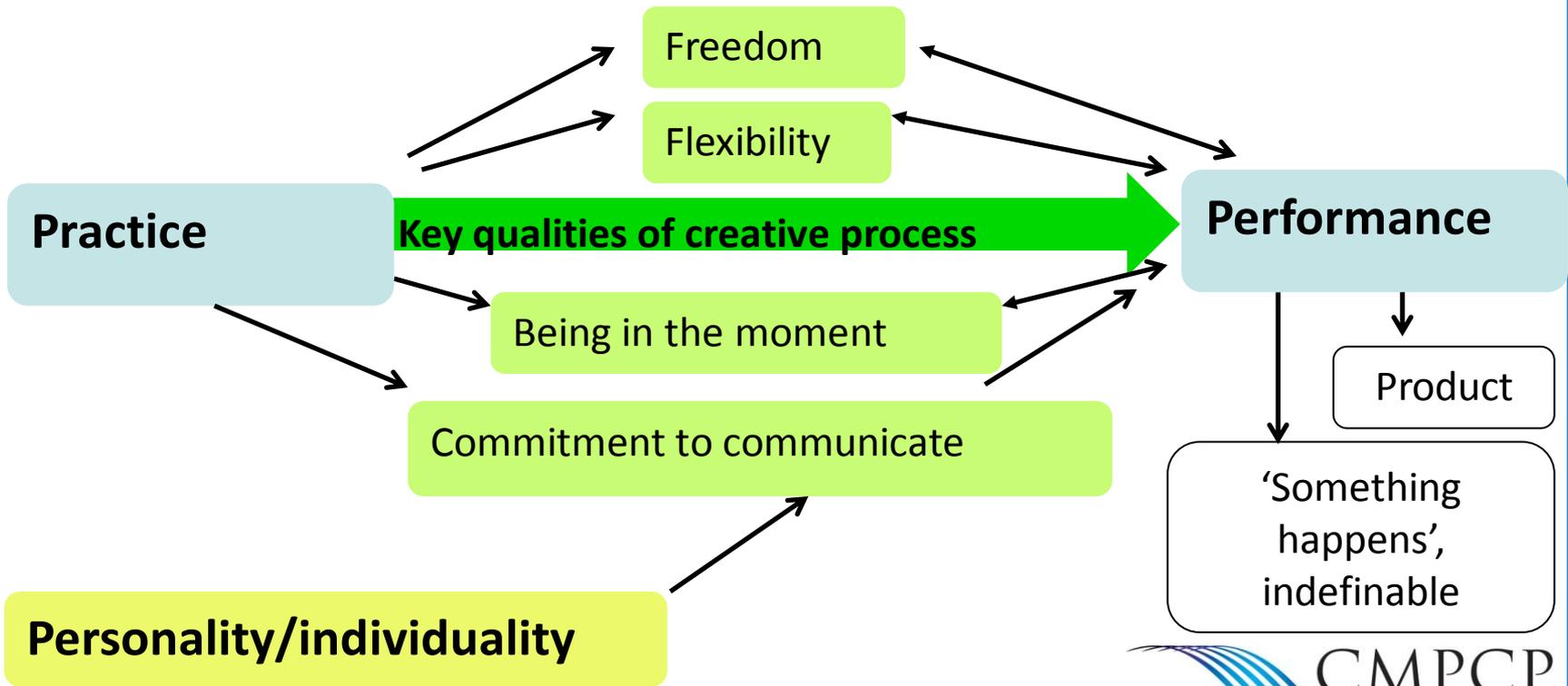


# Focus group interviews: Method

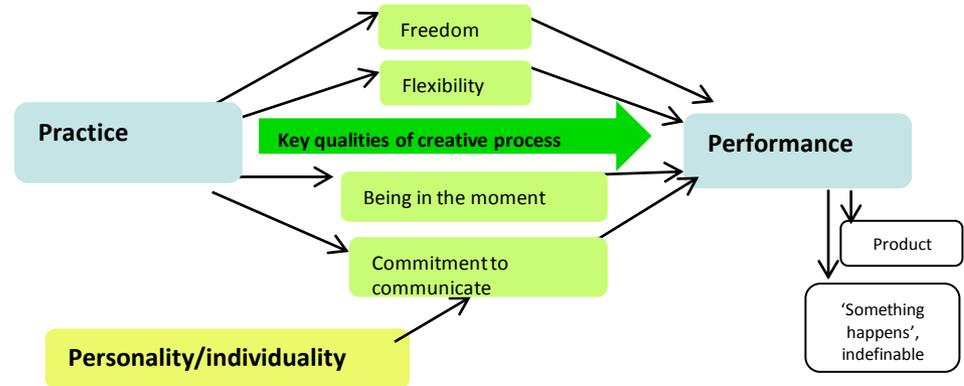
- Sessions of 1.5 hours, one at each institution
- Participants: 5-6
- Three discussion points:
  - The skills you think are necessary in order for students to be creative or original as performers
  - Where creativity and originality stand in the hierarchy of performance goals
  - What you consider your role as a teacher to be in helping students achieve a creative or original 'voice' as a performer
- Analysis
  - Focus group interviews audio and video recorded
  - Verbatim transcription
  - Thematic analysis applying an inductive, semantic coding system (following six analytical steps after Braun & Clark, 2006)



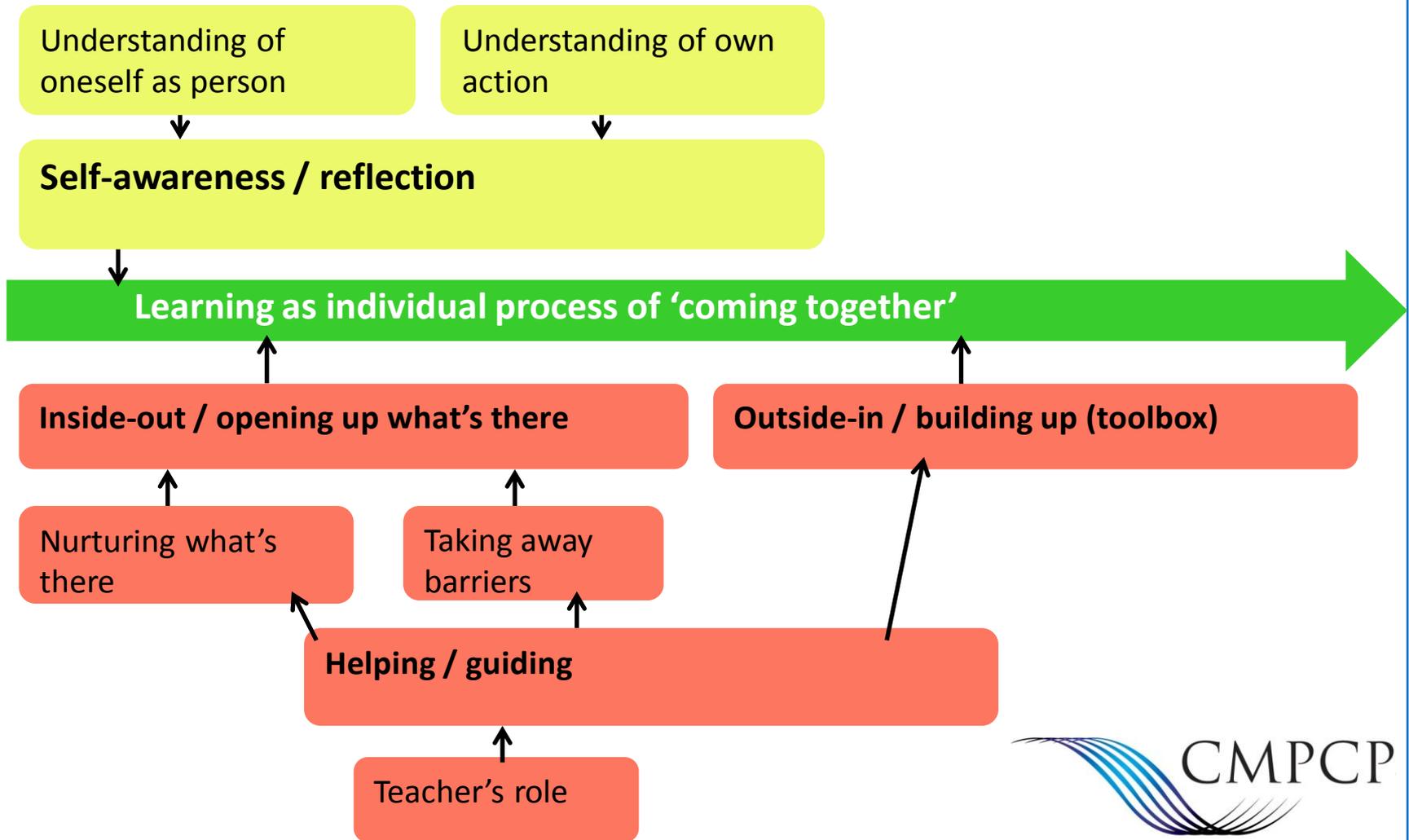
# Conceptual Map of Themes: Creativity in Performance



# Conceptual Map of Themes: Creativity in Performance



# Conceptual Map of Themes: Development



# Conceptual Map of Themes: CiP + D + Witness



## Conceptual Map of Themes: Cultural frameworks, rules and boundaries

### **Cultural frameworks**

- Freedom within boundaries/rules

### **Tradition**

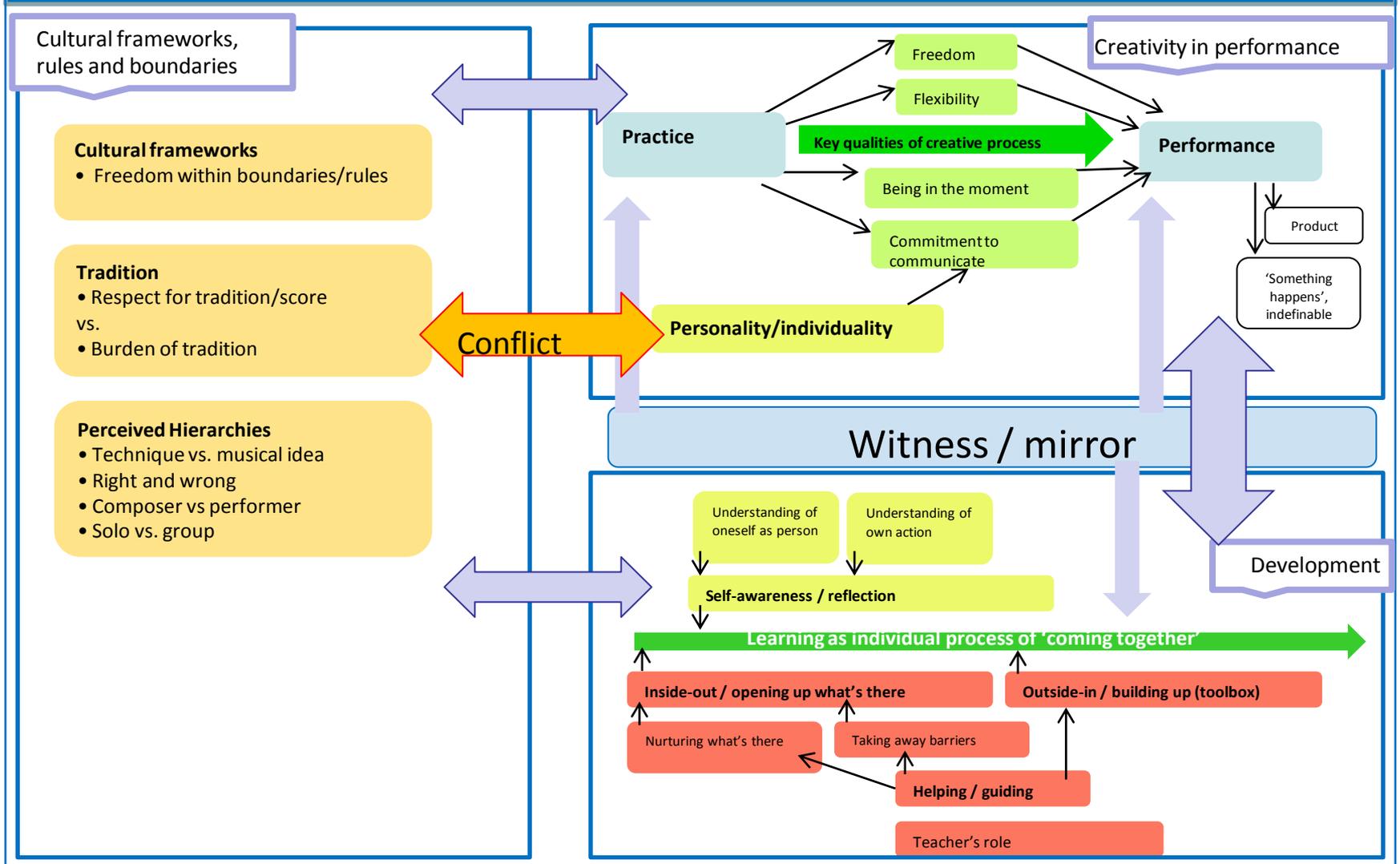
- Respect for tradition/score
- vs.
- Burden of tradition

### **Perceived Hierarchies**

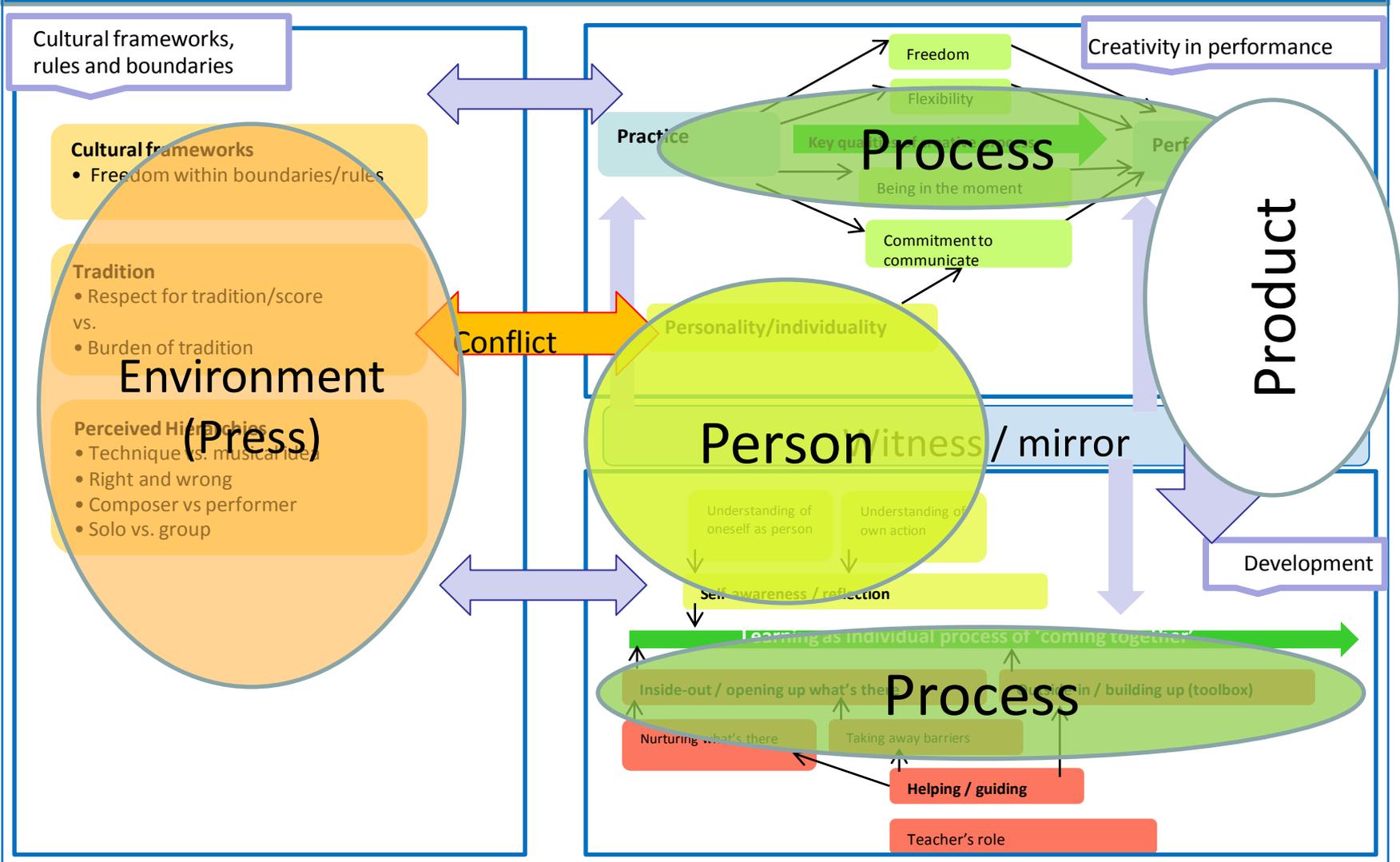
- Technique vs. musical idea
- Right and wrong
- Composer vs. performer
- Solo vs. group



# Conceptual Map of Themes: CiP + D + W + CFRaB



# Conceptual Map of Themes: CiP + D + W + CFRaB



# 'Inside the teaching studio'



# 'Inside the Teaching Studio'

## Research Question:

- What practices and experiences are identified by practitioners as 'creative' or important for developing creativity/originality in performance?



# 'Inside the teaching studio': Method (1)

- Study promoted via Heads of Faculty and 'ambassadors'
- Two-stage recruitment (staff then students)
- Six teacher–student pairs
  - Violin: year 1 UG
  - Flute: year 2 UG
  - Piano: year 2 UG
  - Jazz Bass: year 3 UG
  - Piano: PG
  - Harpsichord: PG
- Two to five consecutive lessons
- Lessons filmed without researcher present
- Participants had power of veto over inclusion of lessons

## 'Inside the teaching studio': Method (2)

- Video recall (Rowe, 2009)
- Participants chose excerpts to show and discuss in recall session (using viewing guidelines)

### **Guidelines for watching footage** (student version)

Please identify moments when:

- you felt creative in your playing
- you understood something about the piece that you hadn't understood before
- something new emerged in your approach to the piece
- you learned something that will help you to be more creative or original in performance

In addition, for teachers:

- you felt especially creative in your teaching



# Video observations and video recall | analysis

➤ Number of excerpts chosen:

Students: 3 to 16  
Teachers: 12 to 16  
= 60

➤ Through interviews identify creative 'episodes'

➤ Episode = a chunk of meaning or unit judged to be a significant happening in the learning context

➤ Can refer to states of mind, experienced mental processes, and/or actions

➤ One or more 'episodes' per excerpt

➤ Different lengths - a moment to several minutes



# Observations and video recall | results

## ➤ Participant's explanation (S2)

- 'she said to me release your shoulders and, I mean she says it to me in every lesson, but sometimes I can do it, sometimes I can't [LAUGHS], but, yeah it worked then [...] I mean she'd been saying this to me for something like a year now, but, [...] even though she'd been saying to me 'you need to release your shoulder' [...], I haven't really noticed a particular difference in the sound, but then, I thought, oh yeah, that sounds better now! [...] And then in the second lesson she also talks about releasing or something and then it sounds better again, and I can see the progression between the two lessons. I thought that was good, that was good.'



# Learning as individual process

## ***Teacher's explanation***

'what I am explaining there is how, if you are too hunched over like that, you're limited [...] whereas if you sit back you've got the whole unit, and ... then the sounds blossoms more, so I am using a [...] very exact technical explanation, to get the sound to be more luminous'

## ***Student's explanation***

'[...] he just said at the end there, "trust yourself" which is a fantastic thing to say, so if you just sit back with the long arms, you feel calmer [...] you feel like you're overseeing the whole system [...] gives you much better sound and psychologically much calmer, you're breathing better, and you know, I just love that, trust yourself ... It's so easy to have so much self doubt, and worry, which immediately makes the sound go quite poorly. I thought that is fantastic. And that can be applied everywhere [...] in performances even better a mantra to have because that's when you are even tighter and even more nervous'

In: James, M., Wise, K. & Rink, J. (2010). Exploring creativity in musical performance through lesson observations with video-recall interviews. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*, 47(2), 219-250.

# 'The start of a journey'

## *Student's explanation*

'[the piece is] in three parts so I actually came out of that lesson and thought about it and, because I used to dance when I was much younger [...] I actually imagined three people walking along but having different dance moves for the different sections and that, when I played the next week, had an impact definitely. It was to do with the movement and the gestures that made me go on that train of thought [...] and also when I played it in the second lesson it was definitely freer'

'I kept going back to those thoughts [until the performance] and when I've got to revisit this piece in the next week or so that will be my starting point, of trying to find those ideas again in the music and then seeing if I can take it any further from there, because I feel I'm on the right track with it [...] when I think of that one moment I can put myself back in the piece [...] it opens the door to where that piece lives, in my head'



# A Jazz excursion

- Classical: teacher and student play same instrument
- Nature of the lessons: Student plays and teacher comments, or teacher demonstrates and student copies
- > Nature of practice: practise on your own
- Jazz: teacher and student play different instruments
- Nature of the lesson: Teacher explains and demonstrates, but playing together
- > Nature of practice: practise on your own & finding partners to play with
- link to performance anxiety



# Emerging insights from 'Inside the teaching studio'

- Creative episodes represented incremental developments (consistent with evidence on development of expertise)
  - i.e. nothing mysterious or 'out of the blue'
- Performance/piece-related creative processes:
  - Creative episodes in lessons often represent the start of a much longer process in which the student practised, internalised, and made the idea 'their own'
  - This sense of ownership seems to be a key part of the creative experience
- Developmental/individual creative processes:
  - Solving long standing global issues, e.g. technical barriers, understanding oneself and one's action



# 'Inside the practice room'



# 'Inside the practice room'

## AIMS:

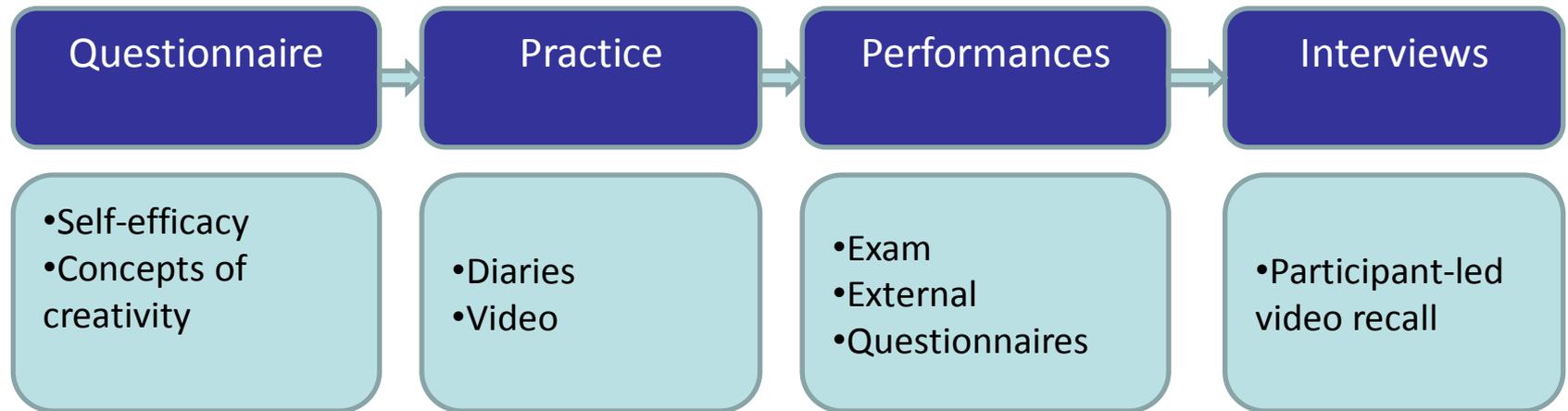
To get a better understanding of:

- Students' experience of creativity in the development of an individual interpretation of a piece
- The relationship between creative processes in practice on the one hand and performance on the other

Longitudinal study with multiple elements, including video recall



# Longitudinal Study elements



# Participants and measures: 1

- 12 classical music students,  
(3 piano, 3 violin, horn, double bass, bassoon, organ, guitar, percussion)
  - UG and PG
  - taking an end-of-year recital exam
- Documented preparation and performance of one piece during 3 designated weeks
  - 5 students videoed their practice and took part in interviews



## Participants and measures: 2

- Today we draw on material from the five students who had cameras
  - Video recall interviews referring to practice videos
  - Diaries
  
- In video recall interviews, students identified creative ‘episodes’ that were significant to them
- In diaries, they recorded everything they worked on, giving structured information (e.g. on interpretative intentions and decisions, the reasons for them, technical work, and ‘inner techniques’)
- Each diary entry refers to a section of the piece the participant was practising, or a run through

# Overview of creative episodes and practice activities within them

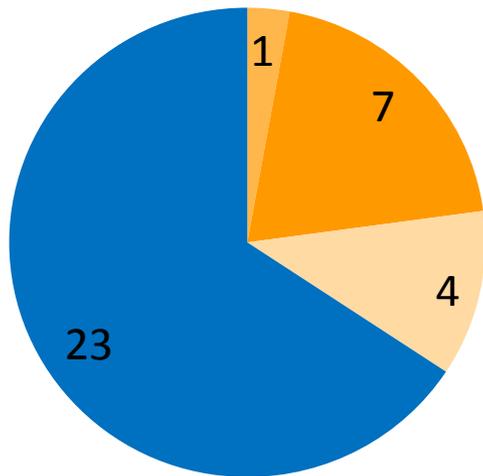
## 1: THE HORN PLAYER



# Overview of creative episodes and activities (video)

<i>Practice session</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Exam	10	11	12	Performance
<i>No. creative episodes</i>	5	4	4	3	2	4	2	2	2		2	3	1	

## 34 episodes in total



■ mouthpiece

■ horn

■ horn +

■ without horn:

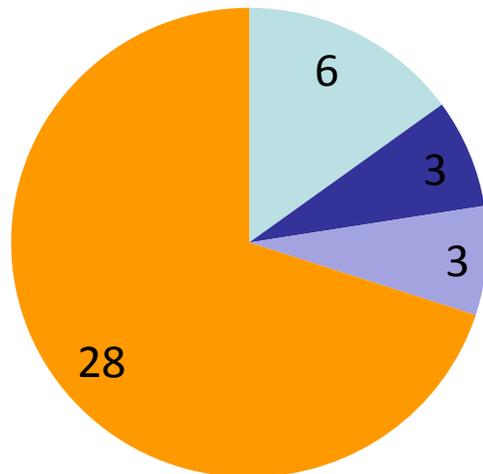
Singing (16),  
 Vocalising (rhythm/articulation)(6);  
 whistling (3);  
 tapping (4);  
 moving body (2);  
 conducting (1);  
 playing piano (2);  
 self-talk (3);  
 snapping fingers (1)  
 Metronome used in 10



# Overview of practised sections and activities (diary)

<i>Practice session</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Exam	10	11	12	Performance
<i>No. of practised sections</i>	2	4	2	2	2	4	3	5	5	5	4	2		

**40 diary entries in total**



■ singing as image

■ singing used

■ "singing" on instrument

■ technical implementation -> horn playing



Overview of creative episodes and practice activities within them

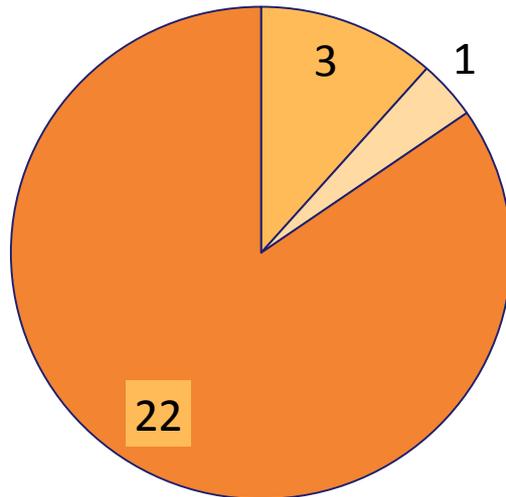
2: VIOLINIST, ORGANIST, VIBRAPHONE PLAYER (PG); DOUBLE BASSIST (UG)



# Overview of creative episodes and activities (video)

<i>Practice session</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Exam	10-12	Performance
<i>No. creative episodes</i>	Violin	2	3	-	-	1	3	1	-	-		-	
	Vibra.	-	-	1	-	1	1	3	-	-		-	
	Bass	-	-	-	-	1	-	(1)	-	-		-	
	Organ	-	1	1	3	-	1	1	1	-		-	

## 26 creative episodes in total



■ playing + talking with pianist

■ playing + singing

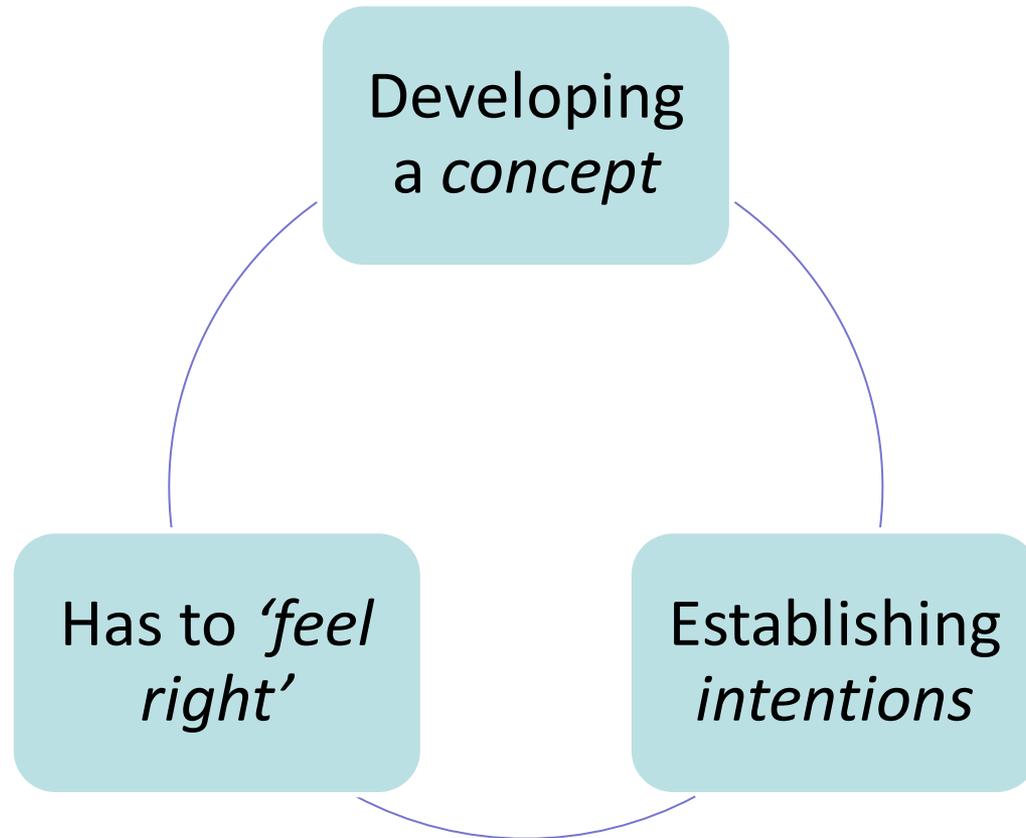
■ playing



# Thematic analysis of interviews



# Elements of forming one's own interpretation



# Pathways and content of the creative process

## **‘Musical parameters-led way of working’:**

Characteristics:

- Score-led
- Intentions expressed as seeking balance and form of different musical elements in relation to the whole
- Focus on immediate sound (i.e. what can be perceived)
- Vibraphone player and organist

## **‘Emotion/narrative-led way of working’:**

Characteristics:

- Emotion-led
- Intentions expressed as seeking emotional meaning or effect, stories, and expressive images
- Focus on emotional impact (i.e. what can be felt)
- Violinist, double bassist, and horn player



# Examples: 'Musical parameters-led way of working'

## Sub-theme: 'Form and balance':

- within those there are certain micro details that are quite important but there's also like a big/ it feels like there's a big picture which is... the most important thing not to mess up' (Vibraphone)

## Sub-theme: 'Balancing elements':

- because naturally when you kind of approach/ sort of on the vibraphone this is the bottom fifth {PLAYS PIANO} and when you get up towards this it starts to naturally be a stronger sound just the nature of the bars so erm this is I've got written here more low notes F F# and G... then here worked on sound erm balancing the chords speed of tremolo, speed of crescendo (Vibraphone)

## Sub-theme: 'Clarity or emphasis – what can be heard'

- before I was using a different sort of trio sonata registration having the right hand on a eight foot on the lower manual and the left hand transposing down an octave on the other manual at a four foot/ the four foot stop, so that the sound is very very similar, which is fun but (...) if there isn't enough interest in the (...) in both sounds, you can't tell what part's doing what which is fun and a nice thing to do in some trio sonatas but this feels (...) nice for this particular one to be able to hear all the parts more clearly (organ)



# Example: 'Emotion/narrative-led way of working'

## Sub-theme: 'Emotional effect':

- you can make a lot more of the quiet dynamics without having to work so hard you can make them really magical (violin)

## Sub-theme: 'Imagination – visual/auditory imagery':

- I thought it was this was the kind of singing that you would do... in um like a night time with a guitar very everything very ... Spanish like you can imagine Spanish as it is you know, guitar and the moon and then there I so I heard myself which I didn't remember saying 'moon', 'luna' that's moon, so I was trying to you know having that thing (horn)

## Sub-theme: 'Story/narrative'

- I really felt like that was the story I needed to kind of help me ... play the music (violin)

## Sub-theme: 'Emotional concept of piece'

- (...) what's going on now something incredibly weird and mad, and then it starts slowly, slowly picking up a lot of tension growing somewhere, somewhere really ... mm like really intensively, but er but with a/ with this steady pulse it/ e/ mm it's a scary piece the whole piece I felt was ... was very ... scary and mad and ... you know mentally not stable.  
(...)(double bass)



# Themes in everyone's transcripts:

- 'Character': looking for and/or naming different characters in a piece
- 'Emphasising or finding contrast and variety'
- 'Experimenting/exploring ideas'
- 'Problem identification and problem solving'

I started to realise that the... um again the arpeggios were very cool but (...) there needed to be an emphasis on some and whether the beginning or the end, there needed to be an emphasis on one of the points of each one... in order for it to make musical phrase. (...) I was thinking (...) how you can link from one, I could link from that to the next with the next one with the repeated notes, so that then the arpeggio didn't, no longer became um this kind of (vertical but but horizontal).  
(Horn)

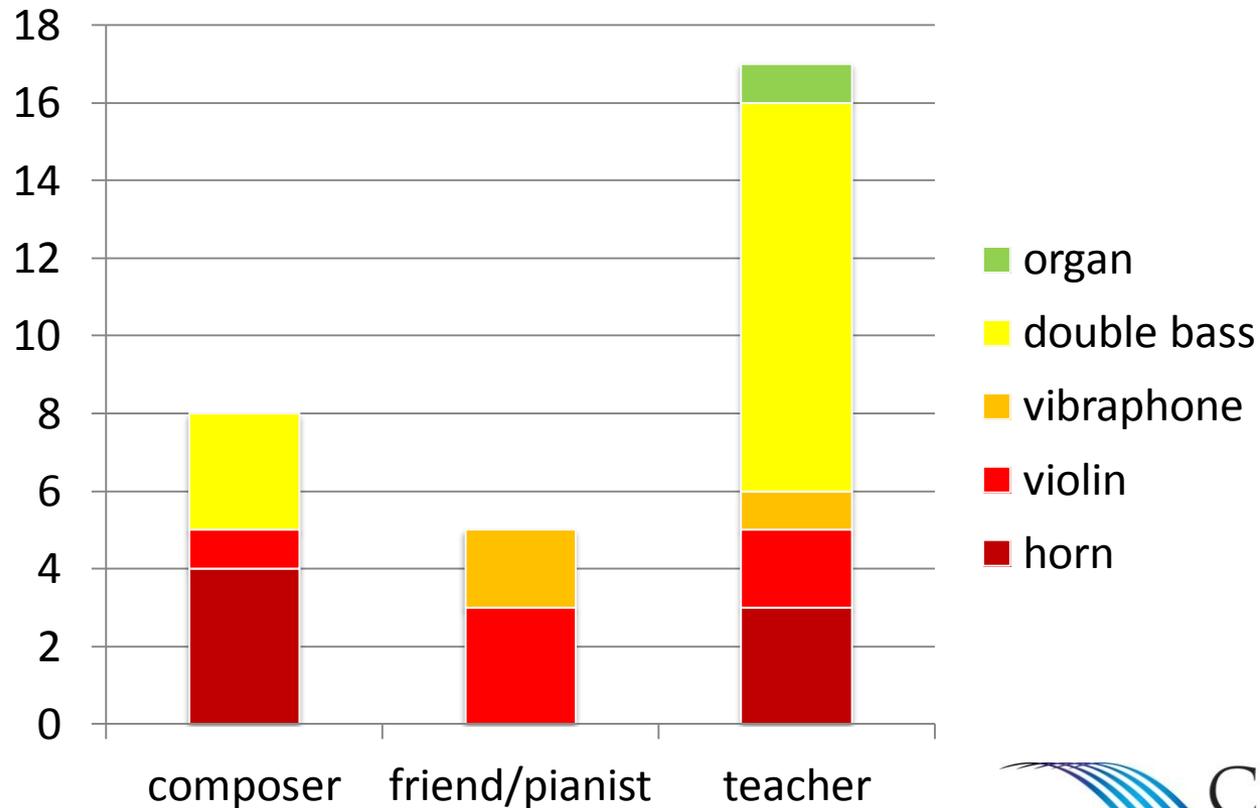


# Content analysis of diaries



# Theme: Other people

➤ Diaries entries including other people:



# Sub-themes: Type of working relationship (1)

## Friend/pianist

Sub-theme: working together (5)

- *My pianist and I used popular fantasy- like characters to create our story line.*

## Composer

Sub-theme: giving guidelines (6)

- *Based on composers' directions (mainly drastic changes in dynamic and character)*

Sub-theme: Composer's instruction in conflict with own intentions (2):

- *Composer is very precise with the intentions of the accents. I want to make it interesting because in the paper it looks very similar. My inner feeling tells me to follow my own musicality.*



## Sub-themes: Type of working relationship (2)

### **Teacher as helper**

Sub-theme: advising/helping- (13)

- my teacher's few suggestions have definitely helped me to unfold the piece in my head.
- I will ask my professor what he thinks about the role of the grace notes.

### **Teacher as trustworthy authority**

Sub-theme: Changing student's decisions (4)

- Beginning tries to emulate church bells, but my teacher has suggested that it must be in tempo in terms of thinking.
- My other teacher likes to accel here, but I feel it is better as the other suggested.



# Sub-theme: Type of working relationship 3)

*Based on Interviews*

## **Teacher as trustworthy authority**

Sub-theme: Changing student's decisions

- (...) a really consciously slower performance speed, based on what my teacher had said to me in my lesson (...) (organ)
- I'm basically (...) made the decision this moment to change the tempo (...) cos it didn't feel right...so I betrayed like I guess my teacher's /... It's not my teacher told me to follow this, but he said the score is there for a reason...and I just said 'no', in this one I said 'no', it's too fast. (horn)

Sub-theme: Accepting teacher's authority

- I mean because normally if my teacher says something like that I'll just explain why and then he kind of will either... be receptive to it or not like generally if he's like mmm I appreciate what you're saying but it doesn't really work I'll just accept that, kind of like accept his authority on it. (vibraphone)



# Teacher's concepts & students' process

Cultural frameworks, rules and boundaries

## Cultural frameworks

- Freedom within boundaries/rules

## Tradition

- Respect for tradition/score vs.
- Burden of tradition

## Perceived Hierarchies

- Technique vs. musical idea
- Right and wrong
- Composer vs performer
- Solo vs. group

Teacher as trustworthy authority

Conflict

Practice

Freedom

Flexibility

Being in the moment

Commitment to communicate

Personality/individuality

Key qualities of creative process

Creativity in performance

Performance

Product

'Something happens', indefinable

Witness / mirror

Understanding of oneself as person

Understanding of own action

Self-awareness / reflection

Learning as individual process of 'coming together'

Inside-out / opening up what's there

Outside-in / building up (toolbox)

Nurturing what's there

Taking away barriers

Helping / guiding

Teacher's role

Development

*With thanks to ...*

*... the Arts & Humanities Research Council,  
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A graphic consisting of several blue and white curved lines that sweep across the page, resembling a stylized wave or a musical staff.  
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AHRC RESEARCH CENTRE FOR MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS CREATIVE PRACTICE

# Reflections



# Reflections: Participants

## Teachers

'I also realised I play too much for her; I learned more about myself watching these things'.

'the main thing that I really noticed is, [...] when I was feeling more inhibited and gave her a lot more space, she worked much better. And when in the one lesson [...] the two of us we were really much more relaxed, actually I've watched the danger of myself being too dominant [...] instead of waiting for her to do the work, which is the whole [...] thing I am trying to do in my teaching.'

## Student

'I thought it sounded fluffy and muffled at the time[...] I felt there was the sound and then there was me, and I like to feel totally engaged with the sound[...] At the time I didn't feel very aware of the sound at all. When I hear it [back], it sounds I am quite engaged with it. Maybe it was because I [...] was very focused at the time on certain little tiny aspects of it and when I look at the bigger picture now it comes across much better.'

# Conclusions

- Developing combinations of different methods allows insights into different facets of musicians' creative concepts and processes
- The focus group data reveals something about the structure of concepts and beliefs
- It also implies the existence of a number of creative processes, involving musical and personal development over different time frames
- The observational data allows us to see if/how those processes play out in practice



# Reflections: Researchers

## Benefits of a participant-led video-recall method:

- sheds light on internal and tacit processes within performance, teaching or practising
- gives participants positive experience in working with their own data and having control over what is used
- reveals insights to both teachers and students which may be missed during lessons
- offers opportunity to focus on specific problems and questions
- provides teaching tool to aid the learning process and support student-led learning
- potentially benefits future research on musical development and learning by integrating 'outsider' research perspective and 'insider' reflection