

104 The behaviour of the orchestral conductor as a model for exploring Values-Based Education

Abstract

Values Based Education is of growing importance both in the United Kingdom, in Singapore and elsewhere. It subsumes many of the competencies inferred by the notion of 21st Century Skills, such as Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Communication and Collaboration, Information, Media, and Technology Skills, Life and Career Skills. Values Based Education implies social meanings, cultural and behavioural contexts and because of this the abilities and practices required are not amenable to forms of instruction, measurement, written tests and examinations. The authors contend that this situation is analogous to music, where ‘knowing about’ is not the same as being able to perform, and being able to perform individually is not the same as being able to do so in concert with others. The role of the orchestral conductor exemplifies a transferable approach because of the explorative and iterative nature of interactions between an orchestra and its conductor in developing forms of performance that are relevant and appropriate. Relationships between forms of assessment, learning, and collaborative problem solving in orchestral settings are explored and form the basis for recommendations both for classroom practice and for further research.

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Authors: Professor John Howard, BA (Hons) PhD FRSA
Director, London College of Music Examinations, University of West London
Dr. Jonathan H Robbins PhD FRSA FRPS FCIEA
Director, Research & Development, International Graded Qualifications Ltd,
Singapore

Contacts: Professor Howard john.howard@uwl.ac.uk
Dr. Robbins jhr@intlqg.org

When we are listening to a recording of a favourite symphony, or jazz or a singer, we rarely pause to think about what the recorded performance entails. We simply ‘listen’ and enjoy the sound and the associations that it evokes without thinking about sound engineers and all the others that make the recording possible. At a live orchestral performance we are more aware of the conductor than when we are listening to a recording, and when watching a broadcast of a performance we are in some ways even more aware of the conductor and of individual players but rarely pause to think about the role of camera operators, the director and all those involved in presenting both sound and performance to us. So although the focus of this paper is on the behaviour of the conductor we first need to place this in a wider context than just that of an orchestra performance and as the discussion proceeds to remain aware of the ‘unacknowledged others’ that shape our perceptions of those outcomes that the conductor seeks to convey.

In photography the term ‘Circles of Confusion’¹ is used to express the meaning of ‘sharpness’ through concepts of resolution and viewing distance. Sharpness of viewed image is not an

¹ Defined for an original image on film or electronic sensor as the largest blur spot or ‘circle’ that is indistinguishable from a point; this is dependent on visual acuity and viewing conditions. For a final

absolute but is relative to purpose, to perceptions, connotations and denotations that may or may not have been intended by the person selecting, focusing and presenting the image and are in any case re-interpreted by the recipient who views the image. Our focus on the behaviour of the conductor is intended to draw out analogies, metaphors and interpretations that enable or prompt forms of meta-cognition and meta-praxis in relation to values based education. So our intention is not to create a 'sharp' and technically correct account of the behaviour of a conductor or to tabulate and compare similarities and differences between values based education and orchestral practice, but rather to encourage ways of thinking about our thinking, and thinking about our practice, that are prompted by representations that might be fuzzy but in their fuzziness pull us towards alternative ways of thinking, alternative viewpoints and alternative practices.

At the heart of the role of an orchestral conductor, is a special kind of knowing that is partly connoisseurship, part technical direction, interpreter, coach and facilitator. Polanyi's dictum that *we know more than we can tell*ⁱ is relevant to this special kind of knowing, the nature of which is demonstrated by the *mastery* displayed by the conductor in each area of his or her behaviour. To be recognised as a master (in any walk of life) not only requires a special kind of knowing but also a knowing of self that might be described as a form of humility. The Master is a master because he knows that he is a novice (in that there is always more to learn), whereas the Novice is a novice because he thinks he is a 'Master'. It is the recognition of such personal mastery that grants the conductor the authority to draw out of her or his players a performance that is more than the sum of its parts. Such performances cannot be created by an approach based on command and control or on what John Seely Brownⁱⁱ calls '*Push*' as opposed to '*Pull*'. Part of that wider context referred to previously comes in those forms of shared and malleable leadership evident in a small ensemble where the special kind of knowing is tacitly shared and expressed rather than explicitly demonstrated by the presence of a conductor. This form of knowing gives rise to particular forms of expression outside of classical western repertoire as for example in Jazz, in the monodic schema of North Indian Classical Music or in the indigenous music of some parts of Asia where 'decorating a melodic line' allows the exploration of emotions, feelings and individual virtuosity. The same is true of the indigenous musical expressions of sub-Saharan Africa where voice, instrument and physical expression give rise to a 'knowing' that creates a fluid and expressive sharing of community and purpose. The focus of this paper is on the behaviour of a conductor within a western orchestral tradition but because the intention is to draw out analogies, metaphors and interpretations that enable or prompt forms of meta-cognition and meta-praxis in relation to values based education, it is useful to encourage reflection on the nature of performance and conducting in these wider contexts. By doing so we delineate the role and behaviour of the orchestral conductor more sharply whilst also calling into questions our own assumptions about what conducting might mean.

Our understanding of the role of the conductor in shaping a performance is central to any consideration of analogies or metaphors between the universe of musical performance and that of values based education. As has already been indicated there is a continuum from a 'maestro' concept of conducting behaviour to a positive but malleable form of performance in which interpretation, responsiveness are fluid, understood and expressed and actions conducted, in ways that appear to be intuitive. What analogies for values based education

image that is enlarged from an original in-camera image it is the largest blur spot or 'circle' that can still be perceived by the human eye as a 'sharp' point and depends on size of reproduction, viewing conditions and the form in which the final image is presented.

might be drawn from along this continuum? Might the ‘maestro’ be analogous to the school or college principal? Heads of Department to something like Principal Violinist? Is the role of teachers that of players of instruments in their different sections? What analogies might be drawn from the more fluid, ‘all as performers and recipients’ end of the continuum? Responses to these questions will depend as much on how notions of values based education are interpreted as on views about conducting and the behaviour of orchestral conductors.

What do we mean by the term *values based education*? For example, do we really mean an education based on values or might we mean something like **education in values** or **education through values**? Distinctions like this are important, both for the selected orientation towards curriculum and content as well as for the results of assessments or examinations. In the context of Art Education, Herbert Read² made it clear that this matter of *In or Through*, is not simply a matter of semantics but of differing philosophical starting points. He described these as being concerned with ‘originating activity’ which facilitated expression and as ‘didacticism’ which focused on instructionⁱⁱⁱ. Is it not the case that in the context of values a similar distinction can be made? Is the orientation of curriculum, content and assessment towards facilitating expressions of social, cultural and personal values? Or is it towards instruction with a focus on knowledge of, and an appreciation of social, cultural and personal values?

What happens if we say that our starting point is neither in nor through values but is simply based upon values? Might using the term *Values Focused Education* allow a more generic or ‘softer’ approach that is somehow more consensual? Is doing so compatible with existing orientations to curricula and assessment practices? Or might we opt for a curriculum infused by values that are intrinsically and implicitly understood and therefore do not need to be taught, instructed or facilitated in any direct way. What might be the consequences of this approach in a culture dominated by images of material success? Or do we side step a focus on values and concentrate on matters of character³ and citizenship⁴?

Fifty years ago we did not suffer from Grade Inflation or Diploma Disease, back then it was probably the case that there was greater tacit agreement on the content and purposes of education and perhaps a tacit agreement that ‘values and character’ were expected to be part of what schools developed. But the way education has been organised and delivered since the 1950’s in England and elsewhere has changed dramatically in most respects. An over emphasis on academic results, testing, measurements, targets and performance indicators has created a generation or more of young adults with unrealistic expectations of what society owes them and a sufficient number of young adults with what is called ‘the lack of a moral compass’, to be a cause for public concern in the United Kingdom, Singapore and elsewhere. As a result there is an increasing emphasis on the need for social, personal and cultural values to be taught in schools. An example of this is the recent report by the British All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)⁵ on social mobility which states that:

“along with history and maths, teaching 'character and resilience' should be an essential part of every school's ambition ... Even though our education system is designed and assessed upon its ability to get lots of

² Sir Herbert Read, English poet, and critic of literature and art (1893–1968)

³ See for example: <http://www.character-scotland.org.uk/about/faqs/what-is-character-education>

⁴ See for example: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/character-citizenship-education/>

⁵ See: <http://www.appg-socialmobility.org/>

children through state exams, very few people seriously argue that the fundamental point of schools is ensuring pupils pass tests”

It is at this point that a search for alternative paradigms for both assessment and teaching of values based education and its derivatives begins; it is also the point where analogies and metaphors might be used to encourage fresh thinking. This paper has explored various facets of interactions and relationships between values based education, the behaviour of orchestral conductors and ensembles together with analogies and metaphors arising from them. We have promoted the importance of looking outside of education in general and assessment practices in particular, in order to gain insights into new ways of thinking and working. As a final example we draw attention to the many accounts of individual behaviour by orchestral conductors to be found in the media and elsewhere. These range from the autocratic to the collegial. We contend that consideration of all these provides a means for exploring how values based education, associated leadership goals and performance might be understood and assessed. For example; how might a consideration of work on leadership and co-operation in orchestras by Boerner et al (2004)^{iv} and their belief that orchestral conductors provide a “*directive-charismatic leadership style of an orchestral conductor [that] is unusual*” influence thinking about the way that values based education and its assessment is conducted in schools?

Conclusions

1. Regarding conducting as a special kind of knowing with implicit expressions of the authority to lead and act; and understanding that ‘knowing about’ is not the same as being able to perform, nor being able to perform individually as being the same as being able to do so in concert with others; provides a basis for using concepts drawn from music and performance in more direct ways than insights gained from analogy and metaphor alone. The reason for this is that the role of an orchestral conductor exemplifies a transferable approach between the worlds of music and performance and that of values based education, its variants and interpretations because of the explorative and iterative nature of interactions between an orchestra and its conductor in developing forms of performance that are relevant and appropriate.
2. Decisions about values based education beg further questions about ‘whose values and why’; about shared purposes; the orientation of a curriculum; the nature of judgements and in particular about the meaning of results arising from assessments and examinations. One way forward in this area might be to consider developing a repertoire of performance characteristics expressive of values rather than the typical subject content basis that dominates much of current thinking about curriculum, assessment and examinations.
3. Interpretation is the basis for all forms of judgement as to the meaning of something. Interpretation and its shared application to the nature of observed performance are central to both musical performance and values based education. The core activity of values based education and assessment is *interpretation* and a judgement about meaning, this is similar to the core activity of conducting in the field of musical performance.

Further Research

- A number of areas for further research have been indicated throughout this paper. Fundamental to these is what is meant by values based education, its variants and interpretations.
- If the educational assessment community does *not* agree (as it surely must) that the *fundamental point of schools is ensuring pupils pass tests*, then the increasing importance of values based education, its variants and interpretations must give rise to a search for appropriate and workable assessment paradigms that are authentic and fit for purpose and this should be the first concern of the further research in these areas that is so clearly needed.

ⁱ Polanyi, M., (1958), *Personal Knowledge*, Routledge, London

ⁱⁱ <http://www.johnseelybrown.com/>

See also: Hagel III, J., Seely Brown, J., & Davison, L., (2010) *The Power of Pull: How Small Moves, Smartly Made, Can Set Big Things in Motion*. Basic Books, Philadelphia

ⁱⁱⁱ Read, Herbert. (1958) *Education Through Art*, Faber and Faber, London

^{iv} Boerner, S., Krauze, D, E., and Gebert, D.,(2004) *Leadership and co-operation in orchestras*
http://kops.ub.uni-konstanz.de/bitstream/handle/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-opus-53582/Leadership_and_co_operation_in_orchestras.pdf?sequence=1