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Juxtaposing teacher voices to explore upper primary school music teaching and learning

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Abstract

Duoethnography and narrative inquiry are used to investigate the perspectives of two experienced teachers from contrasting curriculum specialities, one in music and the other in mathematics within a primary school setting. Initiated by the music teacher, research focuses on the usefulness of embodied and participatory forms of music-making for students in the upper primary school (generally 10-12 year age group). Themes emerge from the research that inform subsequent dialogue including the relationship between accessible participatory experience, minimising tedium for students, self-paced learning and student agency, psycho-social well-being, community of practice and life-long learning. Through a dialogic process, emergent ideas provoke dissonance that leads to re-framed thinking about the teaching and learning of music in the upper primary school context.

Keywords: Duoethnography, contrasting curriculum, mathematics, music, embodied learning, confidence, participatory, student agency, psycho-social well-being, community of practice.

Introduction

When students are positively engaged in learning together there is often a sense of collective enjoyable absorption or 'meaningful coincidence' (Davidson, 2016). In the context of group music-making this can manifest as enhanced synchronicity, social music interaction and musical meaning (Lesaffre, Maes & Leman, 2017). Research of participatory ensembles in music education recommend that teachers "do more to better understand participatory values, ideas, practices, and pedagogy" (Thibeault, 2015, p.7); to rethink the contextual significance and the 'situated nature' of learning in classroom music (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wallerstedt & Lindgren, 2016); to recognise the need for exemplary programs in which "both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits can be achieved through musical participation" (McFerran & Crooke, 2014, p.145) and to gain insights into how "children are socialized into collective musical practices" (Sawyer, 2006, p.162).

These suggestions were considered when designing a research project that evaluated embodied, participatory and inclusive use of melodic percussion instruments within a primary school music program, in Victoria, Australia. This school is referred to as Timpani Primary School and has a range of xylophones, glockenspiel, metallophones and four marimbas (large African style xylophones) for students to use. Embodied learning in music refers to an approach 'in which interactive music systems are conceived as extensions of the human body' (Nijs et al., 2012, p.13). In an ensemble this manifests 'through activities with sounds (listening, playing), with other

people (as in joint action), as well as with music instruments and within the body' (Lesaffre, Maes & Leman, 2017, p.2).

Primary schools are interdisciplinary and disciplinary learning places where many teachers are trained as generalist teachers and others as specialists in key areas such as the arts or physical education. Generalist teachers may also develop specialisms in curriculum areas such as science and mathematics. One way of conducting research as a way for teachers to improve their own teaching, is by learning how teachers of other discipline areas think, communicate and teach (Lee, 2010). In this study, a music teacher and mathematics teacher who each taught the same cohort of students at different times, engaged duoethnography to investigate their perceptions as teachers of two different discipline areas. The research questions asked:

1. How has difference between teacher voices been articulated via the juxtaposition of disparate curricula experiences and points of view related to teaching and learning?
2. In what ways has this inquiry led to a reconceptualization of the teacher-researcher's understanding of a melodic percussion program for upper primary students?

Ten key themes emerged from analysing narrative data from this duoethnography. These are presented and discussed in the second half of the paper, to advise teachers, curriculum writers and educators about the compelling nature of these findings and the need for greater breadth of research in music education, research that embraces a pluralist perspective emergent from the experiences of individuals and leads to improved social outcomes.

The school-based program

The Timpani program draws on the pedagogical approaches of Kodály and Orff Schulwerk (Göktürk, 2012; Giddens,1993). The Kodaly and Orff Schulwerk approaches to music education are two prevalent influences in music curriculum across government and independent schools (Göktürk, 2012; Taylor, 2012). They share many attributes such as emphasis on sound before symbol, sequential enjoyable, play-based experiences and elemental music, drawing on simple musical structures that build in complexity. They prioritise active music-making and share a belief that all children are innately musical. Kodály emphasises singing and the use of sol-fa with hand-signs and a moveable doh. Together with rhythm syllables and development of inner hearing, this approach has been found effective in fostering audiation and music literacy (DeVries, 2001). The Orff approach combines speech with movement and dance and places emphasis on improvisation. The advantage of this approach is the opportunity for children to be creative through elemental music-making. It is generally accepted and acknowledged (Pascoe et al., 2005) that aspects of these two approaches can be used variably and successfully within classroom music programs.

Background to the study

Through regular workplace discussions, the two teachers realised their approaches to teaching and curriculum content, resulted in vastly different levels of engagement, behavior and learning from the same group of upper primary students. Differences between the mathematics and music curriculum, and pedagogical approaches with the same cohort of students were seen by the music teacher as an opportunity to challenge, provoke and potentially reconceptualise the melodic percussion music program (MPP) in the school. The choice of a visual arts teacher who has comparable interaction with same cohort was considered, but the diversity of a non-arts subject teacher was sought as there are many parallels in the arts and an art teacher might be looking for similarities to support the music teacher as a member of the arts team.

The nature of the research design was duoethnography and a teacher of the same

wavelength, same language, same view might not provide a context for critical self-analysis. Therefore a more generalist classroom teacher with a focus and leadership role in a different discipline area (mathematics) was chosen. Given that teachers with different philosophical, pedagogical and discipline leanings make up primary school teaching and learning environments, it made sense to examine the relationship of teacher voices through the two perspectives of a teacher with a specialism in mathematics and the music teacher, as a duoethnographic study.

Methodology

Duoethnography was chosen for its "participatory and emancipatory intentions" (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012, p.10). The participatory worldview elucidated by Heron and Reason (1997) acknowledges that "the primary purpose of human inquiry is practical: our inquiry is our action in the service of human flourishing" (p.11). Participative knowing pre-supposes "a tacit mutual experiential knowing" in which the 'knower' participates in and articulates the world via four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. In duoethnography the participants are the researchers and in this study one of the participant-researchers – Author 1, has an expanded voice. A significant implication of expanded voice is the extension of 'place' in framing this study. In duoethnography place-based meanings such as pedagogical spaces, personal history, geographic, cultural and political spaces are considered part of the inquiry as they contribute to "interactions, conversations and transactions leading to mutual change" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 19). In this inquiry the 'place' of difference between disparate curricula experiences forms a holographic lens through which the participants view a situated music program.

The first research question, How has difference between teacher voices been articulated via the juxtaposition of disparate curricula experiences and points of view related to teaching and learning? refers to difference as constituted by Pinar's (1975) notion of the "currere" or curriculum of "everyday life" (paraphrased in Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p.12). The concept of currere is a critical self-analysis involving the process of "engagement within the contingent and temporal cultural webs of one's life" (p. 12). The second question, In what ways has this inquiry led to a reconceptualisation of the teacher-researcher's understanding of a melodic percussion program for upper primary students? shifts the differential holographic lens to magnify a particular program. Consequently the idiosyncratic 'place' of the melodic percussion program (MPP) has significance in the overall inquiry.

Gouzouasis et al. (2014, p.3) highlights "the importance for including teachers as dialogic partners in the enterprise of music education research". In duoethnography a new curricular text is woven by the participants with many threads including "personal stories as well as the reconceptualization of them, their perceptions of a discipline and knowledge as well as the representation of that knowledge ... their diverse ways of understanding, engaging, and imagining knowledge, and their construction of that knowledge" (Sawyer & Norris, 2016, p. 9).

Ethical considerations

The ethics of self-accountability (Miller, 2011) was employed by engaging in generative inquiry and "examining the relationship of self to practice" through a dialogic lens that critiques the normative and the currently accepted, market-driven values in education. This was enacted through dialogue by employing critical self-consciousness for understanding how both teachers came to know the social reality under scrutiny. That is, each of their current perspectives was "refracted through the story of the other, promoting new perceptions and a sense of praxis, the imagining of alternate versions of self and work" (Miller, 2011, in Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p. 629). They sought to understand complex phenomena of their situated practice through

narrative, intuitive, discursive and reflective means, equally accepting of harmony and dissonance, agreement and variance, normality and anomaly.

Research Methods

In addition to observing one another's classes, four dialogues of approximately an hour took place over a series of four weeks and were held in a meeting room at the school where the two teachers taught. Journal notes were made immediately following the dialogues by the music teacher, to document thoughts and feelings. The use of vignette during the third dialogue provided a window into rich recall of remembered events. Mind mapping and photography were used to document the significant moments. Audio recordings enabled the capture of complex, intricate and entangled stories and narratives. This method was serendipitous for providing a measure of clarity, when recoding the data by listening for nuanced sonic qualities in our voices.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved transcription of the dialogues which were sorted as constructs that were reviewed along with reflective notes and daily journaling. Reflective notes capture immediate thought and feelings while journaling facilitated the exploration of the two teachers' ways of knowing and thinking, often leading to decentering of dominant discourses and revealing bias or assumptions. Once the whole data set was coded for initial constructs, a second reading and recoding of the dialogues using 'initial' and 'in vivo' coding was undertaken. Coding should be "accompanied with careful reading and re-reading of...data as your subconscious, not just your coding system, develops connections that lead to flashes of insight" (DeWalt & DeWalt, as cited in Saldaña, 2013, p.60).

Initial coding is an open-ended approach to coding which enables researchers "to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of...data and to begin to...(take) ownership of them" (Saldaña, 2013, p.100). In vivo coding makes use of "the direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases" (p.61). This step was also beneficial to provide a way for Sandra (the music teacher) to distance her- 'self as researcher' from her- 'self as participant' so as to extract meaning in a more impartial way. Thematic coding of the data followed in which codes were collated into "an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its manifestations" (p.175). To understand narrative data over time, the dialogues from one to four were colour coded and set out in themes on a data wall. Thus adjacent to each emergent theme an evolution in participants thinking that they communicated, became more clear.

Findings – emergent themes

Key emergent themes are described chronologically in the following pages to capture the narrative data between the mathematics and the music teacher. Each theme was introduced and viewed through the data consisting of transcript excerpts followed by reflective journal entries and the voice of literature where relevant. Data were analysed in response to both research questions, juxtaposed through the lens of difference as a means of exploring emergent themes in the quest for a re-envisioning of the MPP.

Theme 1: Confidence

When Robert came to collect the students for his class, they were immersed in a new piece they had learnt. Reflecting on this later he noted: 'Well I didn't see anyone looking uncomfortable, not at all' to which Sandra mused: 'they find their own, you know what I mean they find their comfort level'. The interaction of embodied experience with aural kinaesthetic preparation ahead of instrumental playing in the MPP is supported in research of "sensorimotor-coupling" (Chirico, Serino, Cipresso, Gaggioli & Riva, 2015). In this

perspective sensorimotor-coupling can "enable a corporeal attunement with the environment that facilitates an embodied interaction" (Nijs et al., 2012, p.12). Describing this strategy Sandra claimed, "I immediately went into modelling it and going through the body". In this context "sensorimotor coupling of action and perception plays a defining role" (p.4). Multi-sensorial engagement brings together listening, singing, miming, visual and kinaesthetic patterning that facilitates effortless extension onto the instruments. Using such strategies in the context of mutuality between the players, accessible appealing repertoire and a range of sonic choices can produce a quality of sound, which leads to meaningful participatory music-making and generates confidence in teaching and learning.

Theme 2: Success

The construct of success is linked to confidence and self-esteem. Both teachers found that scaffolding learning so that students experience success in small meaningful steps is important for creating an environment that is enjoyable, motivating and empowering. In a study about the impact of active music-making on young people, it was found that "engagement with music can enhance self-perceptions, but only if it provides positive learning experiences which are rewarding. This means that overall, the individual needs to experience success" (Hallam, 2010, p.282).

Theme 3: Participatory

The importance of shared participatory experience as the foundation of music learning and human flourishing is philosophically situated within the Participatory Inquiry Paradigm (see Heron & Reason, 1997). Participatory performance focuses on the experiential, the lived experience of immersion in music-making for enjoyment in a social context (Turino, 2008). By contrast Turino defines "presentational performance" as emphasising the presentation, the performance or the product and is about "hierarchy, competition, (and) financial achievement" (Buchan, 2016, p.38). There's a great deal of rhetoric amongst music educators about the value of participation in music and yet 'presentational' music continues to be the "default setting" in most schools (Regelski, 2013; Buchan, 2016). Buchan notes that presentational performance does have value in a given context but it can easily become the dominant objective of the music curriculum thereby marginalising other music learning approaches (Buchan, 2016).

In the MPP program maximising participation is the objective, in which the emphasis is on experiencing and enjoying making music.

An unexpected correlation with sport emerged during the first dialogue. Living in Australia where the culture is strongly biased toward sport, has been problematic for music education in some contexts (Brasche & Thorn, 2016; Garrett, 2014), yet due to its experiential nature, music-making is often compared with sport so it wasn't surprising to have this analogy emerge during the dialogues in the context of participatory music.

> Sandra: Can we enjoy it just for the participatory element and enjoyment factor?
>
> Robert: Yeah like sport! you might never be a great sportsman but you might like a bit cricket or footy or whatever...

The characteristics of a participatory music program include "evolved musical structures, values and practices that encourage anyone to join in at any time" (Thibeault, 2015, p.56). The value of maximum participation is combined with an emphasis on 'doing'. The forms of music are typically short and kept fairly simple in order to encourage as many people as possible to join in rather than aiming for virtuosic performance of a minority. The repertoire has appealing layered parts with repeated ostinato patterns that overlay and are repetitious, so that the sound can become pleasantly hypnotic and a "constancy of groove" may emerge (p.56). As Sandra noted 'Yeah so it's a real doing thing!'

The idea of music as a 'doing thing' has been encapsulated by Christopher Small's term "musicking" (Small, 2011). By using this term, Small

has challenged our western platonic 'idealism' as he claims "music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do" (p.2). Others have characterised the notion of active music-making as "musicing" (Elliott, 1991). The primary values of musicking are "self-growth, self-knowledge and enjoyment" (Elliott, 1993, p. 90). Musicking is a multidimensional form of "knowing-in-action" and is "distinctively, perhaps uniquely, a form of embodied agency" (Bowman & Powell, 2007, p.19).

Theme 4: Talent

The notion of talent arose during the dialogues. Sandra was reminded of how prevalent and disempowering this concept can be when her colleague commented "See I love music, but I haven't got musical talent …" The focus on talent as a pre-requisite for being musically active has become a disabling mindset for many in current western cultures. As a socially constructed concept, talent has come to be thought of as a quality of the 'gifted few'. This ideology of a gifted few is elitist because it functions as a screen for discouraging people from participating in and accessing the resources they might otherwise seek to develop musical skills. The obsession with 'talent' as evidenced in the current celebrity culture has infected schools, with the result that "many students are labelled early in their academic life as being innately talented, whereas other children perceive this to mean they are not" (Cogdill, 2015, p.5). The ideology of talent has infected many in the community which has meant that group participation in music has diminished and school administrators and policy makers are accepting the talent myth that "music learning should be concerned with identifying 'talented' individuals rather than developing school cultures that value and celebrate community and participation" (Buchan, 2016, p. 39).

Theme 5: Culture

The theme of culture was characterised as something which is developed by a generalist classroom teacher, as distinct from a specialist teacher. Minimal contact hours for a specialist subject were seen as limiting the possibility for creating a culture of learning in that curriculum area. There was agreement about the value of multicultural music as an opportunity for providing a richer more diverse musical experience. When children sing songs from cultures other than their own, they can be transported to a different time and place which is more than geographic; it's a place of "empathy and imagination...singing songs from different cultures can give children a chance to empathise with cultures, different from their own" (Boyce & Tillman, 2009, p.186).

Theme 6: Social Learning

Both teacher participants recognised the importance of age specific social learning in the way that they scaffold activities for their students. As Robert notes:

> "You need to change it up in grade 6, you need to teach differently; do things differently...so you pull out some really interesting different ways of learning in third term that engages them".

The social learning needs of the upper primary age cohort have been linked to neuroscience research and educators now understand "that the adolescent brain is still developing, sensorimotor stimulation creates stronger synaptic connections" (Wilson & Horch, 2002, p. 57).

In their findings Wilson and Horch recommend activities to promote sensorimotor stimulation such as "playing music that links memory to specific learning tasks, and (using) rhythmic patterns (as) effective memory tools for learning" (p. 57). They also advocated music activities to enhance team building and peer collaboration. With respect to music and social learning, research indicates that students are motivated to participate in music ensembles because of many non-music factors such as social, academic, and family reasons (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003) and to be part of a team or music family (Parker, 2014). In a choral singing context amongst adolescent girls, Parker found that

the barriers which "impeded team (ethos) included cliques and egos" (p.24) and that "team unity in a choir was similar to a music family because of the shared experience of singing together" (p.26). The focus on group effort provides a sense of team sound "Musical ensembles, such as concert bands, depend on the development of cohesion to achieve synergy in the form of an excellent sound and enjoyable performance" (Criss, 2010, p.30).

Theme 7: Community of Practice

Building on from social learning, the teacher participants described their learning situations in uniquely characteristic ways. They use resources that are essential to their subject; mathematics worksheets, visuals and games in the case of Robert; singing, moving, song games, modeled activities and instruments in the case of Sandra. Interactions between students and teachers follow a pattern that has evolved in practice; information is shared and help is given as they undertake agreed upon tasks or goals of the subject. In musical communities of practice, students "participate meaningfully regardless of their level" (Sawyer, 2006, p.163). Emphasis in the MPP is less pedagogically driven and more about students playing together as a community in order to replicate 'music ensemble' within the classroom." Lave (1991) situates learning "as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice". According to Lave "developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skilful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping, and giving meaning to the latter" (p.65).

Theme 8: Whole Class Ensemble

Whole class melodic percussion provides a viable way for schools to offer collective participatory enjoyment of music-making for its own sake. Thibeault (2015) proposes that there be "more participatory ensembles based in schools, more places where everyone can join in together" and recommends that teachers "do more to better understand participatory values, ideas, practices" (p.60). While the importance of musical learning has been discussed by many teachers, researchers and theorists, the reality is that only a minority of students in primary school actually experience playing instrumental music together as a class. Van De Geer (2008) further notes that "lack of appropriate early instrumental opportunities during primary school has contributed to a lowering of students" musical expectations, self-perception and self-belief in their musical capabilities (p.142).

Theme 9: Diversity

Meeting the musical needs of diverse groups of students is essential in whole class music programs. While this paper is not a case analysis of the situated program at Timpani Primary, the attributes of the MPP have been included to provide information and to offer a window to the reader who is a welcome participant in the re-envisioning of this and like programs. Anything more than a cursory overview however is beyond the scope of this study. Further there is no claim to superiority of this program; many of the elements of music methodology and instrumentation described in this paper are employed in the music practice of other teachers and have been researched (see Buchan, 2012; Rankin, 2016; Buchan & Rankin, 2015; Stewart, 2013; Van De Geer, 2008). Rather, the merging of particular strategies with adapted processes and new knowledge may contribute to improved music engagement as an in-curricula option for upper primary school students. The MPP incorporates elements of "universal design" (Darrow, 2010) in which the instructional approach, the materials and in this case, instruments are designed for all students. Universal design strategies include a range of multisensory experiences including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic means.

The instruments used in the MPP cover a range of sonic choices from the deep sounding bass

marimba to higher sounding alto xylophones; the sustained resonant tones of metallophone to the bright timbres of soprano xylophones and higher pitched glockenspiel as well as the variable registers within each of the instruments. The flexible design, (with bar removal) facilitates a range of abilities and the instruments use "gross motor playing skills rather than the more precise fine motor skills often associated with playing traditional orchestral instruments" (Buchan, 2012, p.11). Especially composed marimba music (Madin, 1997) features layering of parts with catchy rhythms in attractive arrangements that appeal to students. Through a process of embodied learning ahead of instrumental encounter, students are able to "self-select" (Van De Geer, 2008, p.6) the part that 'suits' them best. With the short duration of pieces, accommodation of variable skill levels and accessibility of instruments, students have an opportunity to try out other parts.

Theme 10: Formal and Informal Learning

In the interests of maximising the enjoyment of music-making and providing a positive experience of ensemble for the upper primary students, less formal strategies may be employed.

Formal and informal aspects in learning situations move between "two poles of a continuum" (Folkestad, 2006, p.135). Folkestad has delineated four variable ways of "using and defining formal and informal learning ... each one focusing on different aspects: (i) the situation, (ii) learning style, (iii) ownership, (iv) intentionality" (p.135). The MPP may be considered an informal situation, to the extent that learning is less of a planned outcome and more of "a by-product of participating in music-making" (Cain, 2013, p.3); between formal and informal learning, there's a tendency..."to blur the boundary" (Wallerstedt & Lindgren, 2016, p. 2). Informal structures within the MPP may include strategies like self-selection; peer coaching; student conducting and self-paced learning. The intention in the MPP is toward enjoying music-making as a process more than learning 'about music' and it seems more relaxed. Students are led through 'embodiment' of musical parts that brings together listening, singing, visualising and body patterning. The students are getting the 'feel of the music' before they encounter the instruments. By self-selecting parts and instruments, they are further encouraged to take initiative.

Implications for Teachers

In light of the lack of research on collaborative, participatory music in primary school contexts that involves percussion instruments outlined at the start of this paper, 10 key themes have been discussed to show the importance of these aspects of music education.

To provide a critical perspective this study has employed dialogic discourse as a medium through which the MPP might be re-envisioned, because analyses that don't have "critically reflective teacher pedagogy at the centre are unlikely to help children become life-long cultural producers who can do more than perpetuate the status quo" (Buchan, 2016, p. 239). There is a need for more research into student perceptions of participatory collaborative programs. By understanding how students perceive the "music-learning culture in which they exist, music educators may better prepare ways by which to cater to the individual musical needs of all students" (Kellett, 2016, p.133).

Further research may examine situated programs and the particular combination of strategies and processes being employed and the meaning this has for students in upper primary school. Attention could be given to repertoire and forms of instrumentation best suited to the ideals of participatory music-making. Enhanced embodied learning could be investigated for its effectiveness with respect to flow performance in whole class music-making. Perhaps a greater understanding of the pre-conditions in situated music contexts like the MPP may assist with increasing the likelihood of this occurring in primary schools. While the experience of flow in music contexts cannot be

orchestrated, some research suggests that there is a need for increased opportunities of flow experiences (O'Neill, 1999) for children. With a shift in emphasis from pedagogical process and presentational outcomes to an approach in which the intrinsic value of music is balanced with the extrinsic benefits of social and emotional well-being (McFerran & Crooke, 2014) and a positive sense of community (Lave,1991) it may be advantageous to research situated case studies of in-curricula programs like the MPP.

Conclusion

It may be that the MPP is a good fit for upper primary students if it meets their physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs while building confidence and self-efficacy in actual music-making contexts. Research shows that educational disengagement amongst disadvantaged students occurs through lacking a sense of belonging to the school community and thereby a reduced willingness to turn up and participate (Considine & Zappala, 2002; Moses & Villodas, 2017). To understand the effectiveness of embodied learning, strategies of access and participation as well as the social experience afforded by this and like programs, further research needs to occur. Such studies might consider a situated context such as the MPP 'in which to investigate characteristically human social cognitive processes and social interactive dynamics' (Lesaffre, Maes & Leman, 2017, p.3). Re-framed thinking about the teaching and learning of music in the upper primary school has emerged during this study and signals a need for further research into students and teachers' embodied experiences in multi-modal ways, the role of participatory forms of music-making and the implications for social development as well as the wider community.

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