

“Surface and Depth”: Generative Tensions for a “Comprehensive” View of Music Education

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Abstract

In this address, I explore the possibilities of a comprehensive view of music education that works from and towards a notion of children as “curriculum-makers.” Drawing on the findings of a number of research projects, I explore the generative tensions that exist in the transitions between the music of the home and that of school, between the learning and teaching practices of the school and children’s communities of musical practice, and between the curriculum of the school and children’s individual goals and aspirations. The interrogation of these generative tensions provides a context to consider the implications for curriculum of children’s visions of their musical futures. I suggest that were we to admit children to the curriculum-making process, to value their role and contributions as “curriculum-makers,” curriculum-making might well become a comprehensive process.

Introduction

In laying out the central argument of his classic text *Art as Experience*, John Dewey reminds us: “the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience” (1934, p. 1). He suggests that the prestige that particular works of art acquire can create “conventions that get in the way of insight” (1934, p. 1), that a work of art can become “isolated from the human condition under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience” (1934, p. 1). Pursuing this argument, he suggests: “the real work of art is the building up of an integral experience out of the interaction of organic and environmental conditions and energies” (1934, p. 67).

In later work, Dewey suggests that education in and through the arts can “prepare a person for later experience of a deeper and more expansive quality” (1938, p. 28). Maxine Greene (1995, 2001) and Elliott Eisner (2002), amongst others, have taken up this view as they argue for the centrality of arts experience in education and life. Dewey’s focus on experience does not discard the art object or event: rather, it leads us to consider our relationships with such objects and events more carefully, and to consider the meanings these hold for ourselves and others. Dewey leads us to move beyond the sensuous surfaces of arts experiences to consider the depths of meaning they can offer and the ways in which they can inform our lives (Shusterman, 2002).

Pondering upon these views has led me to think about the music curricula we develop and implement with children. Have particular approaches to curriculum acquired such “prestige” that we no longer see beyond the “conventions” that surround them? Is it possible that a music curriculum can become “isolated from the human condition under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience” (Dewey, 1934, p. 1)? Were we to consider, to paraphrase Dewey, that the actual music curriculum is “what it does with and in experience,” what are the implications for the ways in which we shape and implement music curriculum? Does the music curriculum we offer prepare our children for “later experience” of music and life of a “deeper and more expansive quality”?

Before we can begin to address these issues, there are some prior considerations that need to be taken into account: what do we know of children’s experience of music curriculum? How do they understand music curriculum? What does music curriculum *do* with and in children’s experience? Importantly, how do children experience music? What does music “do with and in children’s experience”?

My research program has been concerned with these questions in various guises, as I have sought to arrive at an understanding of children’s perspectives of the arts (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003), of music (Barrett, 2003a, 2006a), of music learning and teaching in youth arts settings (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007), and of the nature of children’s musical thought and action (Barrett, 2003a, 2003b, 2003/2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006b). In this presentation, I shall draw on the theoretical contributions of a number of scholars beyond the field of music to interrogate the notion of what we mean by a “comprehensive view of music education” and to consider the implications

of these meanings for music education in the contemporary world. I shall draw on a number of narrative exemplars (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002) generated through my ongoing research with children in a range of arts learning and teaching settings to interrogate these emergent issues within the context of music education.

Theoretical Background Curriculum and “commonplaces”

Traditional views of curriculum as a defined body of knowledge that is “performed” through an agreed set of practices, and underpinned (and maintained) by a common set of beliefs and values have been challenged. Schwab’s (1973) assertion that curriculum-making needs to be considered within the framework of four “curriculum commonplaces,” those of subject matter, learners, milieus, and teachers, was an early prompt to widen the conception of curriculum beyond that of knowledge, skills, and attendant beliefs and values, to one that recognized the role of local contexts (milieus) and children and teachers in the curriculum-making process. Drawing on Dewey’s focus on experiential knowledge, curriculum theorists such as Michael Apple, Maxine Greene, Philip Jackson, and William Pinar have re-conceptualized curriculum as an individual and social construction that is shaped by local contexts as well as mandated policy and practice. In further work, critical theorists have uncovered the ways in which hegemonic structures are perpetuated through curriculum policy and practice by examining curriculum theory and practice through the lenses of class, gender, ethnicity, and race. A further challenge lies in the recognition of the influences of globalization and technology, where the notion of the “local” and inter-linked communities is no longer a geographical construct, and the gross inequities of

“cyberdiscourse” (Eisenstein, 2001) must be admitted. In short, “curriculum” has become an “essentially contested concept” (Gallie, 1964).

Drawing on the work of John Dewey and Hannah Arendt, Maxine Greene suggests: “a curriculum in the making is very much a part of a community in the making” (Greene, 1997, n.p.). Conversely, a made curriculum is also reflective of the community it serves, and furthers the ends to which that community strives. This is brought home forcibly in recent examinations of Adorno’s critique of music education in Germany during the Third Reich (Kertz-Welzell, 2005), a period in which, it is suggested, music education was a medium of indoctrination, complicit in the production of a compliant, uncritical, and unquestioning population. For Adorno, music education promoted National Socialism through an emphasis on community over the individual, and the use of singing as “an education in the ideology of National Socialism” (Kertz-Welzell, 2005, p. 4). Following the war, the use of music education as a means to social engineering was evident for Adorno in the use of “pedagogical music,” described by Kertz-Welzell as “a kind of ‘instant’ music which is not too demanding, but which sounds pretty and consonant” (2005, p. 5); an instance, perhaps, in which attention directed to the surface of musical experience distracts from the careful investigation of the depths of musical meaning. In developing a music curriculum we must be cognizant of the community/ies it serves, and the ends towards which that community strives.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly have taken up the notion of curriculum making as a localized social practice in their work with teachers and children in school communities. Writing in 1992, they argued that teachers are “curriculum makers” rather than

“curriculum implementers.” In making curriculum, teachers engage in a process that is lived out over time, in classrooms and schools, and which draws on and impacts upon the lives of all concerned: children, teachers, and community. Importantly, teachers’ work occurs within “professional knowledge landscapes” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), where their personal knowledge is situated in and shaped through the complex interplay between the worlds they encounter in their classrooms, and that of the profession (and its attendant theories and practices). The multiple landscapes in which teachers (and children) live and work can become sites for conflict as the experiences of the lived curriculum “bump” against those of the mandated curriculum (Clandinin, 2006a; Clandinin et al., 2006).

The ways in which teachers make meaning of and shape their professional practice has been explored through the careful examination of parallel or paired narratives. This examination of public and private accounts of phenomena and experience provides opportunity to explore the points of tension, of agreement and disagreement, in individual and collective understandings. Building on Clandinin and Connelly’s interrogation of the paired narratives of stories of teachers/teachers’ stories (1996), Craig, in her examination of teachers’ work and lives, produces “story constellations” that explore the dimensions of the teacher, school, reform, curriculum, and society (1999, 2006). She examines stories of teachers/teachers’ stories, stories of schools/school stories, stories of reform/reform stories, stories of curriculum/curriculum stories, and stories of society/society stories in an exploration of curriculum-making and dissemination (2006). In further work in our understanding of curriculum-making, I shall explore the possibilities of another “partnered story”: stories of children/children’s stories.

Stories of children / children's stories

The literature in music education is replete with stories of children: stories of what they learn, how they learn, and in what sequence. These stories, created and told by adults have shaped children's music experience in formal music education settings (Barrett, 2006b). However, "bumping up" against normative accounts of children's musical development (e.g., Deliege & Sloboda, 1996; Hargreaves, 1986), engagement and experience, other accounts are beginning to emerge (e.g., Barrett, 2005a, 2006b; Campbell, 1998, 2002; Marsh & Young, 2006). These accounts have begun to trouble some taken-for-granted notions of what constitutes music development, of the nature, scope, and purpose of children's musical thought and activity. The notion that children are more than "adults in blueprint" has led to a growing interest in children's participation in the musical cultures in which they live (Boynton & Kok, 2006).

As we seek to develop a multi-perspectival view of curriculum and curriculum-making in music, it is essential that we explore children's stories as they unfold in their daily lives (Custodero, Britto, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2003), as well as the sanctioned stories others tell of children. The notion that children are unable to present a view of themselves to the world, to construct and communicate individual understandings, has been challenged in the fields of development (Rogoff, 2003), the sociology of childhood (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998), and in arts education (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003, 2007). Children are "culture-makers by nature ... they are born into history and community" (Abbs, 2003, p. 55). The recognition of children as "active contributors to, rather than simply spectators of the complex processes of cultural continuity and change" (James et al., 1998,

p. 83) has grown significantly over the last decade. In relation to music specifically, I have argued that children are engaged in "culture-making," as "meme-engineers" who select, reject, adapt, modify, in short "engineer" their musical narratives and life-worlds (Barrett, 2003a). Just as children are "culture-makers," I suggest that children are also "curriculum-makers." As a profession, I wonder if we are prepared for the challenge such recognition offers us?

In the following, I shall present three children's stories as narrative exemplars (Clandinin, 2006b; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of music and music education experience to illustrate some of the generative tensions that arise from a multi-perspectival view of curriculum and curriculum-making in music education. These are drawn from various research projects that have explored the nature of children's musical thought and activity.

Narrative exemplar 1

Jay¹ is one of 20 participants in a 3-year longitudinal project that aims to identify the function of invented song and music-making in young children's identity work (Barrett, 2005-2007).² Children have been recruited from two settings, a Kindermusik program,³ and a childcare center. Child participants are aged approximately 18 months when they join the

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all research participants throughout the narrative exemplars.

² Barrett, M. S. (2005-2007). *Young children's world-making through music: Young children's identity construction in and through music*. Australian Research Council Discovery Grant No. DP0559050.

³ Kindermusik is a commercial franchise that provides group music tuition in dedicated age-related programs for children aged 0-7 years approximately.

project, although some have joined at later ages (up to 36 months). Data generated in the project include: interviews with parents at regular intervals; observations of the child participants by researchers in either Kindermusik or childcare settings; interviews with workers in either the Kindermusik or childcare settings; parent-developed video diaries of their child's musical activity; and parent-maintained weekly overview diaries of their child's musical activity (paper diary). These field texts are providing material for the development of rich accounts of young children's musical thought, activity and identity work, and providing insight into the ways in which children and families use music in their daily lives.⁴

Jay's story

When I first met Jay aged 3 years and 2 months he had only been attending Kindermusik for 6 weeks. In our first interview, Jay's mother told me he "spends a lot of the day dancing round, singing made up songs And he has a guitar he's had for about 2 years. He loves to, not play it, but he loves to make music with his guitar. Whenever he hears music on the CD player or sees something on the television the first thing he does is he runs and gets his guitar and sits in front of the television or sits in front of the CD player and plays along" (Mother, Interview 1).

Jay is absorbed in and by music, "it's just an integral part of his life" (Mother, Interview 1). Music marks his routines, his moments of quiet, his moments of exuberance, his communication with others, his moments with himself. "He spends a lot of the

time," says his mother, "a lot of the day, he's just free forming around the property. And I notice sometimes he's just running. He was doing laps and he was singing as he was doing laps.... Quite a free existence" (Mother, Interview 1).

Jay's mother has captured one of these moments on video, and I sit in my university office watching a small figure, clad in blue gumboots, jeans and a bright red jumper flash through the gum trees and the tall grasses of the family property, singing along to himself. He comes to rest by a stone wall, draws breath, and starts to sing again. Waving his arms in alternation for emphasis his song-making works through fragments of "Old MacDonald," references the middle section of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," and works to a triumphant exclamation with both arms raised to the sky. I can't quite discern the words, but note there's a lot of syllabic play around "um" sounds.

"I sing a lot too," his mother continues, "along to things, and we'll dance and sing. And he doesn't necessarily sing in a structured manner to music. He does sometimes but he prefers to make up his own songs just to do with a running commentary on what he's doing or just nonsense sounds, which he's a bit into at the moment. I keep telling people he can talk. They don't actually think that's English. It's his own language.... Sometimes he just picks up his guitar and dances around and makes up a song and sings a song ... he'll take something that's said or what's happening and he'll make a song out of that" (Mother, Interview 1).

Waking up early one Saturday morning, excited about playing with his dad at the weekend, he sings "I'm in the bed, rolling in the sea" (October 2,

⁴ Jay's story is crafted from interview data (mother), video diary data, weekly overview diary data, and field notes.

2006: diary). In the bath with his baby brother, he makes up a song "I like peace, I like quiet" as he helps wash Adam (September 30, 2006: diary). On another bath night, he sits on the floor as Adam is bathed, playing the xylophone and singing "Moon, moon, shining and silver," relaxed, his usual exuberance softened (September 20, 2006: diary). Adam features in many of his songs, including "Adam's boat hat song" (September 12, 2006: diary) and "I'm playing with Adam the baby in the bush" (October 10, 2006: diary).

Jay sings medleys of favorite songs as he watches the rain, standing on his bed, or as family members gather in the lounge-room. His favorites include "Bob the Builder," "The Bear Went Over the Mountain," "See-saw Margery-daw," "Kookaburra Sits," "Wheels on the Bus," "It's our Time," "Grandfather's Clock," "One Little Duck," "Old MacDonald." He'll sing to anyone, even Oscar, the family cat, who is serenaded with Jay's version of "Three Blind Mice" (October 20, 2006: diary). Adam, a ready and receptive audience, follows his brother's musical moves, listening intently, shrieking with delight, babbling along, and echoing his brother's vigorous activity.

Jay's mother has captured the two of them one morning, Adam seated on the floor gurgling happily as Jay sings and dances through four verses of "Kookaburra Sits." Jay revels in the attention of his audience, stepping around the living room in time to his singing, alternately clapping for emphasis or gesturing from side to side. By the second verse he is jumping, feet poised together to mark the beat to the line "Pants on Fire." Verse three requires a deeper, growly voice as he leaps from foot to foot turning in circles

on the living room floor. Verse four is the "big finish," marked by a return to jumping on the spot, and a *ritardando* on the last line. A vocal flourish concludes the performance, as he sings the final word "be" from the bottom to the top of his range, and raises his arms into the air to shadow the movement of the pitch. Adam squeals with delight as Jay, the modest performer, strolls to the French windows to observe casually to his mother, "It's a nice day Mum."

Jay is well-versed in the songs and actions of the Wiggles, accompanying his singing with a sure and steady marking of the beat with feet and hands, his whole body alive with the music. He often dances and claps to his mum's recordings of country, bluegrass, and folk favorites.

The soundtrack of Jay's life is constant, varied, and woven into the family routines and practices. "Well the last couple of days we've put on quite a lot of Dolly Parton," says his mother. "Today, for instance. Yesterday we played some Dolly Parton and Aretha Franklin. Yesterday and today he just asked for the Kindermusik CD which I hate but he had that on a lot of the morning I don't listen to commercial radio. I don't want to sound pretentious but I listen to Radio National so the radio is not really a source of music as such but um yes some contemporary music—Missy Higgins and that sort of genre. It's quite eclectic. He has quite an eclectic mixture in the day it'd be hard to [pause]. Yes and my father lives next door to us and he has a lot of music as well, stuff that I grew up listening to and he also plays a lot for Jay. Also for Jay he plays a lot of classical which I don't really play. Not that I don't like it I just don't play it. But he purposely plays that to Jay Oh yes he likes the Wiggles

but we don't have any CDs because we haven't got around to getting any. I've got a few Playschool CDs. He likes those Playschool CDs, and I think mainly classical CDs and he does listen to the afternoon shows but there's nothing explicitly music in those ones. He doesn't mind an ad. Loves an ad" (Mother, Interview 1).

Jay is adept at strumming his ukulele, the instrument slung low, the neck angled down, his right hand maintaining a steady, rhythmic strum. Whilst the "guitar" is his favorite instrument, Jay can make an instrument from anything. Two egg cartons, struck together, accompany his song "Here we are in the kitchen" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Music has always been important in Jay's mother's life. "I used to play the flute when I was younger, used to play a lot of music, sing and I haven't done that for years. But we have a lot of music in the house and my husband enjoys it too but not in any creative capacity really. Just the CDs these days. I sing with Jay and we dance around and that sort of thing. Yes, every day there'd be some sort of music in the house I still love really daggy music. Steeleye Span and

all these very daggy ... growing up I had a lot of that sort of thing, a lot of that music my parents played. Since I've grown up I've actually gone and found the CDs and played them It was Ry Cooder that sort of thing as well and Gordon Lightfoot, the folk stuff I've bought them all myself which is really sad, and now Jay likes it!" (Mother, Interview 1).

Jay's mother describes her childhood experiences with the flute: "I started playing when I was about 8 or so I considered going to the Conservatorium but my parents talked me out of that, not being a good career. But they've since said they really regret doing that, and I probably wouldn't have pursued it anyway, but I've played for a lot of years but I haven't for about 10 years now" (Mother, Interview 1).

Later in the year, in the midst of family preparations for lunch, Jay stands in the lounge-room strumming his ukulele with a steady beat, stomping from side to side like the best of rockers. "De, de, de, goodbye, Play mu-sic, play mu-sic" he sings, whilst his 6-year-old play-mate, Lachlan, blows on the harmonica. "I can play, I. Can. Play," he continues with emphasis, before putting the ukulele on the table as Lachlan walks away. "Are you going to play us a song Jay? What music were you playing mate?" prompts his dad. Jay returns to pick up the instrument and heads towards the kitchen where Lachlan is raiding the 'fridge. Jay begins strumming the guitar, hitting his stride as he reaches the kitchen bench. "In the kitchen, ki-ki-kitchen, in the kitchen, in the kitchen, oh, oh, ooh," he sings, "In the kitchen, in the kitchen." As the family prepare sandwiches around him, and Lachlan removes various items from the 'fridge, Jay adds "Cookie time,

Cookie time, we're gonna have Coo-Kie-Time."

A few days later, Jay is in the kitchen early in the morning, strumming his ukulele, singing quietly to himself, "Yummy, yummy, yummy. Yummy, yummy, yummy." As Oscar, the cat, stalks the bench searching for a quiet spot to sit and wash, Jay begins to hum "Twinkle, Twinkle" meditatively, marking the rhythm of the words on the ukulele. Gradually, the momentum builds as he transfers his attention to a shaker, transformed into a microphone, and launches into a full-voiced rendition that draws heavily on the stylistic conventions of R&B.

But Jay doesn't need an audience to make music. Filming from the stairwell in the family home, his mother has captured his meditative strumming of the guitar as he sings through his favorite, "Old MacDonald." He plays with the words ("had a bull-dozer"), the tempos, the rhythms and embellishes the melody before he falls silent, clutching the guitar, lost in thought or imaginary music.

For Jay, life is music, music is life. Jay is a prolific music maker who will bring to his school experience a rich and varied listening experience, an ease and confidence in his music-making as a singer and an instrumentalist, and a significant history of his own song-making, a feature he shares with many children. For Jay, music is a life-encompassing event, it accompanies his thought and actions throughout his waking moments, and those between wakefulness and sleep. Music is used to celebrate the day, to affirm who and where he is, and, as a companion and a comfort. Our challenge as a profession is to build on such energy, enthusiasm, and passion, to extend his current rich use of music, and to prepare him

for "later experience of a deeper and more expansive quality" (Dewey, 1938, p. 28).

Narrative exemplar 2

Let me now turn to Troy. Troy was a participant in a 3-year longitudinal study⁵ of young children's (aged 4 years at study commencement) musical thought and activity as composers, song-makers, and notators (Barrett, 2003/2004, 2005a, 2006a⁶). Findings from this research indicate that young children's musical thought and activity is diverse, complex, and situationally dependent. Reflection on the field texts generated throughout this study has also highlighted for me some anomalies in the ways in which we work with and understand young children's participation in music in school settings. Troy's story illustrates one of those anomalies.⁷

Troy's story

I met Troy, the youngest child in a family of five (an older brother and sister), in a kindergarten in which I undertook a research project. The project explored the nature of young children's musical thinking as composers, song-makers, and notators and allowed me to visit on a regular basis to work alongside children in an improvised music corner. I recall Troy as dishevelled, unkempt, the child with the constant runny nose, kept dry through frequent use of an arm or shirt-

⁵ Barrett, M. S. (2001–2003). *Sound to symbol: An investigation of children's musical thinking as users of notation*. Australian Research Council Large Grant No. A00106136.

⁶ The research methods and techniques are outlined in these publications.

⁷ Troy's story is crafted from video data of music interactions, interview data (teacher), and field notes.

sleeve. I have an enduring memory of his hands grasping textas, or splayed open on the drawing paper; hands that were remarkable in their deeply ingrained grubbiness, and, for a boy of 4 years, considerable strength. I also recall those hands, one suspending a cymbal, whilst the other stroked a delicate shimmer of sound from the instrument with the ridged edge of a mallet.

As I left school one day, I glimpsed Troy loitering at the edge of the school boundary. A wood-truck lumbered to a halt and Troy climbed into the cabin. As the truck pulled away, the axes and chainsaws rattling across the tray, I noted the man driving the truck and the name on the door: his father I wondered? Or a worker?

Later in that first year of the study, Troy completed the Primary Measure of Music Audiation (Gordon, 1986) tests with me. The tasks require children to listen to recordings of paired sound patterns, to match same and different pairings of rhythm and/or pitch patterns and to demonstrate this understanding by circling on a prepared work-sheet matched and un-matched pairings of simple images (for example, two shoes for the same; a shoe and a boat for different). Troy struggled with the task through the first seven or eight examples, until he suddenly pushed back from the table at which we were seated exclaiming "I know how to do this!" Ignoring the sound recording, he proceeded to complete the task sheet, circling all same pairings of images. "I do this with Mrs Jones" he continued, referring to the remedial teacher, and ignoring all attempts to re-direct him to the "correct" procedure. Needless to say, Troy did not score well on the PMMA. In subsequent discussions with his kindergarten teacher, Troy was

described as a child in the lowest percentile of academic achievement on the standard measures used in that school, and one who was totally uninterested in the music experiences offered by the classroom teacher (a broad repertoire of action songs, finger plays, counting songs, and nursery rhymes). She was unsurprised by his actions, describing them as "typical" of boys like him, predicting that his future lay in the family wood-cutting business rather than in doing anything "arty."

In September of the following school year, I visited the classroom to which Troy and a number of the other study participants had been promoted. As part of the study procedures, participants could choose to work with me singing songs, playing instruments, making their own compositions, and finding ways of recording these through invented notations. In his first session with me that year (participation by children was entirely voluntary), I asked Troy what he remembered from working with me the previous year (some 9 months prior): "Playing with the instruments," he replied. I prompted him about singing, asking if he could remember the songs he had sung to me, particularly the ones he had made up. He responded that he could remember everything but wouldn't sing me a song now as "I hate singing songs Because it's not fun." Instead, Troy pulled the glockenspiel towards him, and spent several minutes experimenting with mallets of different size and material (wood, metal, felt) before selecting the medium sized felt mallet. Over the ensuing 20 minutes, Troy improvised a range of melodies that demonstrated an understanding of melodic and rhythmic patterning, and, as he returned to a particular pattern, a strong musical memory. He also picked

out the melody to “Row, Row, Row your Boat.” As we talked it emerged that he had worked these tunes out on a keyboard. He described his working process to me, one that occurred during visits to a friend of the family: “Someone hasn’t tried to teach me yet. But I couldn’t play it, so then I just figured it out when they completed it. I try playing it and then I make it up and then I started practicing and then I get it right. ‘That’s not it, that’s not it,’ and then when she came back again I played and she said, ‘That wasn’t “Row, Row, Row Your Boat Gently Down the Stream,” was it?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ [pause] I know ‘Happy Birthday’ too.”

I started playing the melody to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” asking if he knew how to play that one as well. Troy shook his head, picked up his mallet and starting at the beginning began picking his way through the first phrase of the melody: “That wasn’t right,” he commented, starting again, and persisting until he had the phrase correct.

Troy told me he had a guitar at home where “the whole family plays the guitar but my brother and sister are not real good—they just strum it.” It was Troy who finished the session, telling me “I think we should stop,” and taking himself back into the classroom.

I was writing up field notes during the recess break when Troy came charging back into the room. “This is my friend,” he announced, indicating an older boy, perhaps grade 5, who was holding a highly polished steel string guitar. “He can play.” Without speaking, the older boy sat on the floor in front of me and launched into a recital that covered jazz, classical, R&B, and popular standards. He played with accuracy and musicality, evident in his

phrasing and use of expressive conventions. When the bell rang he handed the guitar to Troy, waved a hand at me, and left the room. “He’s teaching me,” said Troy as he hauled the guitar onto his lap and started to pick out the opening bars of “Smoke on the Water.” Whilst he struggled with the size of the instrument, he produced a performance that captured the spirit of the work.

What does Troy’s story tell us about curriculum and curriculum-making? Troy drew on his prior experience of one-on-one sessions with an adult to construct our working together on the PMMA as yet another remedial session. In that context, he “knew” the conventions of the paper and pencil task, and constructed the PMMA as a symbol matching exercise. His performance on this task would suggest that his aural skills were limited. Yet, when engaged in authentic music practice, Troy demonstrated strong aural skills, evident in his capacity to play by ear.

Troy was described as a child for whom music held little attraction. Indeed, he was cast as not “arty,” uninterested in music, and unlikely to succeed. Yet, in a context of his own making, Troy demonstrated an intense interest in music-making. In his life beyond school, we glimpse Troy making a music curriculum in which he is fully engaged, a curriculum that he attends to with determination and an evident commitment to building his skills. For Troy, the school curriculum provided little challenge, and little opportunity to extend those skills and interests that he valued. To return to Dewey, what does the mandated curriculum of school do “with and in Troy’s experience”? What could it do with the evident engagement with music that exists in Troy’s life beyond school, his life with family, and friends?

Narrative exemplar 3

Further challenges for music education arise from the analysis of data generated through a recent national (Australian) study⁸ of children's perspectives of the meaning and value of the arts in their lives, and the nature and extent of their participation (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003, 2007). In phase two of this project, 135 children aged between 5 and 18 years participated in artifact-elicited interviews that sought to probe their perceptions of the arts and their participation. Children were recruited from 27 youth arts organizations across the nation, covering the arts forms of circus, dance, drama, media, music, and the visual arts. An analysis of the data generated in music sites (4 in total) revealed five key factors concerning children's perceptions of participation in music youth arts settings. Children attribute participation in these settings to: (a) a love of performance; (b) a shared unity of purpose; (c) a desire for challenge and professionalism; (d) the quality of relationships developed and sustained in these settings; and (e) the opportunities for individual growth and well-being that arise in these settings (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007). In the following story, Alana, a 13-year-old girl who was a member of a children's choir speaks of her love of singing, of her engagement in the choir, and of her musical aspirations.⁹

Alana's story

Alana, aged 13, decided very early on that she wanted to be a singer, and

had been a member of the Chorale since she was 2 according to her account of affairs. "I was in the city when I was very little—about half a year old and I was looking at the Christmas fairy lights. My mum took me to the city to see the fairy lights display and I was sitting down and watching. The next thing on the big TV in the middle of the city was the Christmas Show and there was a concert going on to one side of the TV and I sat there looking at the concert which was Lisa [referring to the Chorale Director] and the old, old, old Chorale and I said to my mum that I wanted to be like that lady."

I wondered what had kept Alana so interested and committed to the ensemble that she had spent so much of her lifetime in the Chorale: "Just the people are so nice and she [the conductor] doesn't just do contemporary music. She does all music—like deep music with feeling and she does all different types of music. She doesn't just focus on one area of music or the one composer."

Music and singing are at the centre of Alana's life: she sings in school, in the Chorale, and takes lessons in a schedule that fills her week: "I do individual voice lessons at the Conservatorium and I sing in the school choir and I have a few solos in the school choir and I have had a couple of solos for the Chorale in concerts that we have done—I have sung a solo ... I sing on Mondays here and Tuesdays at 7:30 in the morning and on Wednesday I play band and on Thursday I do Chorale and on Friday I do nothing and on Saturday I go to the Conservatorium and on Sunday I don't do anything either I used to do ballet as well and jazz but I don't do that anymore. It was just too

⁸ Barrett, M. S., Smigiel, H., & Weingott, P. (2002–2004). *Australian children and the arts: Meaning, value, and participation*. Australian Research Council Linkage Grant in partnership with the Australia Council for the Arts Grant No. LP0211106.

⁹ Alana's story is crafted from interview data (Alana) and field notes.

much with German [language] immersion and all the singing that I do."

For Alana, the Chorale is work, is friendship, is family: "Well everyone knows me here really well. Most of the people here know me really well and we all know each other and we all take care of each other and we look out for each other and we are all like—basically one big mass of brothers and sisters that sing together every couple of days in the week." Alana contrasts that experience of family with that of school where "there are people at school who are really mean and people who don't know you that well and make judgements but these people [referring to the Chorale]—they know me and my friends really well and we all look out for each other."

I asked Alana, "Why do you think there is such a different feel in places like the Chorale than there is in school?" Alana's response was immediate: "Because I think in the school choir, people don't really appreciate music as much as they do here because if we do it in another language in school, we don't get it translated and we don't get—our old teacher left and a new teacher came and the choir doesn't really try hard for him but I try my hardest but I can't really pull the whole choir along because they aren't really trying. It is just that Lisa makes music be meaningful to someone and not just something that you sing because you have to—every Thursday ... she translates everything and she takes all the words in great detail and she will say, if there is a Latin song, she will ask someone, 'What does this word mean?' and we will have to try and get our brains around what words mean what and then we put the feeling of our

singing into the particular words of the song."

I was beginning to gain some insight into the learning and teaching practices of the Chorale, a place where there is "thinking work going on as well as the feeling work and just the sheer enjoyment of it." Alana continued, "there is something about the people and Lisa and everything that makes you appreciate music – not just singing it because you can." Alana spoke of the "grabbing of my attention that Lisa has. She just makes me listen and if she tells me not to do something then I am not going to do it. With other choirs I will kind of wait around a bit. Lisa is a really good conductor and she communicates really well with the choir and she is a really, really nice person and she has done a lot of good things. She told us once that she conducted her first choir when she was 6 ... [With] the teachers at school—I kind of get the impression that they are not really—like their profession is not teaching a choir as such but the conductor—the singing teacher at my school—he is new and I don't think he really takes it seriously. He kind of gives the impression that 'I am not wasting my time teaching you to sing—I am getting paid for it.' But Lisa just means everything she says and if she sings—she has got a really good voice as well and she can play piano and she can do a lot of things musically, and she just has the impression on you that she means everything she says and she will make all her pupils have 100 percent effort in their work."

"And she gives 100 per cent?" I queried.

"Yes," Alana responded, "because the teachers expect you to give 100 percent but they only give about 70 percent themselves. Lisa expects 100

percent and puts forward 100 percent so you are not feeling as though you are doing everything that she doesn't deserve because she is doing everything she can to make up for it as well. In the end all the work is worth it and you get concerts and opportunities to audition for operas and—yes.”

Dedicating so much of her life to singing, I wondered about Alana's family and their involvement in music, in the arts.

“My step-dad is a painter and he paints very well and my mum was a ballet dancing teacher. She was in the London Ballet Academy and the Royal Australian Ballet Academy when she was younger. She wanted to be an examiner for ballet but then she met Nathan and everything kind of changed. She was a gymnastics coach as well. [My brother] has been in camouflage gear and holding guns with helmets since he was 4 He has done boxing, kung fu, gymnastics and that is it. We go to all the shows as a family most of the time and we go to all the concerts as a family and we go to other productions mainly as a family but sometimes my brother doesn't come—things like ‘Annie’ and things like that and my step-sister is also—she is an actress for Shakespeare.”

With so much happening in the family I asked Alana, “what do you think makes somebody an artist?” Her answer revolved around meaning, commitment, and appreciation: “Just by meaning what they are doing and not just doing whatever they are doing because they are good at it, and meaning everything that they put into what they are doing and giving 100 percent effort, and just appreciating the particular thing of what they are doing.” She went on to describe her goals. “I like performing for people

and I like singing on stage—I just love being on stage. I love it ... all the lights and people looking at you. I just like being able to do the thing I do best for everyone. I want to be an opera singer and that is about it. I just want to be an opera singer.”

Alana had brought a number of artifacts to the interview, including a picture of herself with Aled Jones with whom the choir had sung, a program of a past performance, a music award from the previous year at primary school, and her old ballet shoes. We discussed why she had chosen these to bring to the interview and what they told us about her involvement in the arts. For her, the photos showed “enjoyment and entertainment and how much fun it is, not only just being serious and doing the thing that you want to do but also enjoying it as much as you can and meeting different people and making connections with people who are in the arts and they make a big influence on you.” She had received the music award “for making—for being committed to the senior choir of 2003—for trying my best and I sang a couple of solos there as well.” Importantly, it showed “that I am ready to make a commitment for what I do.” She spoke of commitment also in relation to her ballet shoes, commenting that “I enjoyed it but I didn't take it seriously and have a commitment for ballet. But I take singing seriously and I have a commitment for singing.”

Commitment is a central theme in Alana's story: commitment to singing, to a life in music, to the ensemble in which she sings, to the teacher who inspires her and leads this ensemble to make music at the highest levels. Alana's is one of many stories that have been generated with young people across Australia, stories that provided

evidence of the importance of the arts in young people's lives, of the time and dedication they devote to arts experience and activity, and their desire to achieve in the arts to the best of their ability. The findings of this research raise several questions as we ponder the implications for our curriculum-making:

1. Are children offered sufficient "performance" (as distinct from "playing") opportunities where engagement with an audience and the sharing of their "love" of music is a feature?
2. What are the characteristic features of "unity of purpose" in school music education, and how might it be fostered?
3. Are children sufficiently challenged in their music-making?
4. Are the relationships generated in music education supportive of musical development? And
5. Is individual growth and well-being fostered through music education? (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007).

Reflections on generative tensions

The three accounts from research that I have shared with you create some generative tensions for music educators. I describe these as generative as, I suggest, the arrival at a singular solution is not our goal. What these accounts provide for us in part are rich illustrations of the variety and range of children's musical experience, expertise, goals and aspirations. As "generative" tensions they challenge us to consider the development of curricula that can build on the rich resources young people bring to the experience of schooling in order to prepare them "for later experience of a

deeper and more expansive quality" (Dewey, 1938, p. 28). What would a comprehensive music education look like were we as a profession to embrace fully the role of "curriculum-maker" rather than that of "curriculum-implementer"? Importantly, what could we learn were we to admit children as partners in the process of curriculum-making?

That the arts are central to our understanding of ourselves and others is irrefutable. These assertions arising from philosophy are borne out in those research findings that have sought to understand young people's perspectives of the arts in their worlds. As Maxine Greene reminds us, "We realize that our seeing and hearing are often enhanced by whatever explorations we have done in the different media of the arts—how we have sought our own symbols, our own images, even our own melodies; how we have tried to make imprints upon the world" (Greene, 2001, p. 192). Do the music curricula we prepare for children assist them in making "imprints upon the world" in ways that are meaningful to them?

Our challenge as curriculum-makers is to avoid "the safety of well-worn paths and ideas, and appeals to a mythic and idealized past" (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 2), in order to ensure that a concern for preservation, conservation, and continuity does not create conventions that "get in the way of insight." Importantly, in acknowledging the role of children as curriculum-makers, we may well gain fresh insight into those conventions, as we work towards a more "comprehensive" view of music education.

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