
The marginalisation of music in early childhood teacher education programmes**Lynne Anderson**

The emergence of the Arts Curriculum in 2002, the subsequent integration of the arts disciplines music, visual arts, coupled with the emphasis on other curriculum subjects has resulted in a reduction in the number of hours given to music in the Bachelor of Education (Teaching) degree at the Auckland College of Education (now the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland.) This paper looks at kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the value of music both personally and professionally and music content in their pre-service teacher education programmes.

This paper is drawn from a larger study (Anderson, 2003) that investigated kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the role of music in early childhood education. In this paper, the study, its methodology and the research sample will be outlined briefly. Two aspects of the study, the value of music as curriculum for young children and the music content in an early childhood pre service teacher education programme will be discussed. The links to literature will be examined and finally, implications for the future will be posited.

Rationale for the study

This study evolved as a consequence of the development of the Bachelor of Education (Teaching) (BEd Tchg) at the Auckland College of Education; (now the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland). In developing the new qualification, it was decided that the Arts disciplines, music, visual arts, dance and drama be integrated in line with the new Arts Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2000). In rationalising this decision, the Arts curriculum was allocated four modules in the thirty six module qualification. This meant that each of the disciplines had one module over the three years of the qualification and consequently a reduction in the number of hours offered for music from 150 hours in the previous qualification to 50 hours in the BEd (Tchg). The researcher's concern about this situation gave the impetus for the research discussed here.

The study: Methodology and research sample.

I selected a qualitative methodology for this investigation. This study is interpretive in that it is about making sense of the perceptions of nine kindergarten teachers of the place of music in early childhood education. It is, as Crotty (1998) states, looking at “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of social life”. The roles of the participants in this study were pivotal to the success of the study. They were the people who “define, explain, interpret and construct reality, and as such they are as important as, if not more important than, the researcher” (Sarantakos, 1998, p.51).

As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that knowledge does not exist independently of the social context in which it is constructed. Therefore participants’ perceptions of the importance of music in early childhood is socially constructed and influenced by the music experiences they have had in their lives. Their situations are ever-changing “rather than fixed and static; events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly affected by context – they are ‘situated activities’” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

Nine participants were involved in the study. In relation to the number of research participants, Merriam (1998, p.8) asserts that "the sample selection in qualitative research is usually (but not always) non-random, purposeful, and small, as opposed to the larger more random sampling of quantitative research".

I deliberately chose to interview kindergarten teachers in preference to teachers in childcare centres. All teachers working in kindergartens are required to be qualified with either a Diploma of Teaching ECE (the benchmark qualification), or an undergraduate degree. Those who have the Diploma of Teaching or an undergraduate degree will have gained their teaching qualification over an extended period of time and it is assumed that there would have been music content of some significance within the qualification. Using non-probability sampling techniques (Cohen et al., 2000; Merriam, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998) that is, targeting a particular group, the sample was chosen because they all have a benchmark qualification.

The age range of the participants was from twenty-three to mid fifties. The ethnicity of the group encompassed New Zealanders from various European backgrounds, and teachers from the Pacific Islands nations. There were eight female and one male teacher in the investigation, but for the purposes of this study I am using the feminine pronoun 'her' to ensure anonymity of all the participants.

The kindergarten teachers expressed their views by means of interviews and a written account, in this instance autobiographical writing. This incorporates an approach which (Cohen et al., 2000) define as a personal record of an event through which an individual seeks an explanation of life experiences told from a personal view-point. Because leading questions and excessive guidance are generally avoided, this approach can produce insights which may not result from more traditional methods of data collection (Cohen et al., 2000). Participants were asked to write freely about their musical history, and any connections they currently make with music in their lives. The data gathered in this way gave me the opportunity to refine the questions that were asked in the semi-structured interview that followed.

The interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy by participants. The analysis of the data was facilitated by the use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software programme through which the data was analysed by identifying themes, patterns and issues that emerged from the transcribed material. Data were coded and categorised through a grounded approach (Sarantakos, 1998) developing theoretical ideas from the analysis of the data.

From the initial sixty categories, derived from the interviews and transcripts, eleven themes emerged and fell under two main headings; personal influences and professional influences. The themes relating to personal influences were; early memories, influences of church music, music preference, and the aesthetics of music. Those themes relating to professional influences were the value of music as curriculum, music and children with special needs, cultural considerations, commercial influences, and music experiences in a pre-service teacher education programme at college. For this paper two themes; the value of music both personally and professionally as curriculum, and pre service teacher education programmes are discussed.

The value of music as curriculum

There are compelling arguments, exemplified repeatedly in the literature, for providing a qualitative music programme in the early years of children's lives. There is now convincing evidence that music is highly significant in promoting young children's development in the cognitive, social, emotional, physical and spiritual domains (Bridges, 1994; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Haines & Gerber, 1996; McDonald, 1993; Wylie, 1996).

In particular, early music training has benefits for children's brain development (Fox, 2000; Hodges, 2000; Strickland, 2001/2002). Music study starting in the early years, and spanning a prolonged period of time, changes the brain through improved connectivity (Strickland, 2001/2002, p.30). Indeed, a number of writers suggest that music offers other cognitive benefits, such as developing vocabulary, memory and auditory and listening skills (Bridges, 1994; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995).

There is a significant body of literature that outlines music's many functions and relevance to children's own music involvement, for example; emotional expression, entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, physical response, validation of social institutions and religious rituals, contribution to the continuity and stability of culture, and contribution to the integration of society, (Bridges, 1994; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Haines & Gerber, 1996; McDonald, 1993; Ministry of Education, 1989; Wylie, 1996). Significantly, also, Fox (2000) and Gardner (1983), argue that children's continued exposure to music promotes the development of musical intelligence. Still others see music as valued for group and social experiences, (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Davies, 2000; Tait, 2001). Schmidt (in Costa-Giomi et al., 1999) suggests that music study at any age can increase the quality of life, and contends that those who teach it, are handing present and future generations a gift whose value is only now beginning to be appreciated.

While music can be regarded as a support in all learning, the intrinsic value of music for music's sake must not be forgotten. Music is an expressive and creative outlet offering a permanent source of pleasure (Nichols & Honig, 1995; Simons, 2001;

Stellaccio & McCarthy, 1999), or quite simply a sedative or escape from menial tasks (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Davies, 2000; Tait, 2001).

All of the participants in this investigation saw music as being valuable to them personally and professionally. This is evident in the rich descriptions they gave of the value of music.

Bu used her professional judgement when providing new music for the children to hear because she believed this gave children opportunities to extend their own music knowledge.

Sometimes I do different CDs now and then and they don't know what to do with the music. They don't know how to dance because it is different to them, but it means a lot to me. I understand for the children it's good to have what's familiar to them, but I think it is really important for the children, to experience other music as well.

Jan recognised the value of music involving children in the broader kindergarten environment. She saw a place for background music if children are responding.

I'm also aware of the little ones there, at the table and they're just humming away themselves and so I look around to see if there is anyone, that's very important, those children who are listening on the outskirts but if it's just going in the background I go and turn it off because I like them to listen to cicadas and that is a beautiful sound because I think silence, throughout - to appreciate the sound. We want them to value music.

Jan related her valuing of music to her own perceived lack of music ability and wanted the children to have opportunities to develop their own music skills.

I like them to feel that they can explore music, perhaps because I can't play a piece.

Kate related how music helped to settle children.

I had this little girl in the afternoon who would just not settle and nana stayed with her and she wouldn't mix so one day I put this music on and she came up to dance, to Nutcracker Suite. I found out that there is a video out with Barbie and this music, and the children really like it, so we do lots of ballet, so that's been really lovely.

Music Fan saw the value of music as being more than just early childhood music.

*We don't just listen to children's songs because it would only be this big when there is **this** much and something they hear might stimulate them to do something. They still have that memory of the something that made them feel good and if you don't show them this much you might miss out a bit.*

Peggy described strong feelings about the value of music.

Music is part of life. It is very, very sad if you have missed out enjoying it. I think that is so sad as it is part of the world

Sue related her valuing of music to the musical experiences that she had in her early life.

If people were brought up with exposure to classical or exposure to a particular kind of music, perhaps you'd have a leaning towards that. I would have never thought we were musical. I wouldn't have considered myself musical but I did appreciate music and the values of music and what it does for your soul, your well being.

Sam's feelings about the value of music were bound up with cross cultural communication in her kindergarten.

The depth of what music means to Pasifika families is inspiring and that just sends fuzzies all through and you just think, "Yes, this is why I do songs and dance and this is why I do music experiences". It is so universal, it doesn't matter, whether you have no English, or whether you've got limited English, the music experiences themselves just cross across that boundary and they include

children of all abilities. I think it empowers people. You don't have to have a fabulous voice just doing it, and dancing and rhymes and play. It opens the world to people and it just crosses borders like you wouldn't believe, and for me it's exciting.

Sam's recent experience of using classical music added a new understanding of the value of this type of music with young children.

I learnt the power of classical music, more than anything, and I've never been a fan of classical music because I was forced to play it on the piano and I hated it. Now, getting out there and putting some on, was just mind blowing as to what it can do for little ones, like for rest time and quiet time and a cooling down time. Just playing with different music types has been amazing.

Jan had clear ideas about the value of music and how this linked with her professional responsibility to provide music experiences despite her perceived lack of music ability.

Music is a vital part of being a happy healthy human being. I feel passionately that, as a teacher, music is a vital part of the early childhood environment. I see my role as providing opportunities for children to explore music, and as an encourager to nurture an appreciation, interest and enjoyment. I do not have musical skills to share with children but have an appreciation, voice, sense of rhythm, and ensure I use the talents of the kindergarten community.

Kate, while doubting her own musical talent, was clear about her professional responsibility.

I think what I don't have in talent I make up for in pure enjoyment and the children respond to this. It is the teacher's passion that will inspire a response in children.

Peggy's thoughts on the value of music were simple and forthright.

Music is part of life. I still feel enjoyment/involvement is important. Teachers lead by example. They are the role models; therefore it should be fun and enjoyable.

Sam acknowledged the value of music as a tool for developing confidence in children.

I have seen and worked with music as a powerful tool to build and develop self-esteem and confidence of many children. My love and need to incorporate music as everyday experiences stems from the excitement I see in the learning experiences of children.

Sam also had positive experiences with music as a cross-cultural tool.

Music is universal. I have used it to touch children across the language barriers; it is a validating way of acknowledging children's cultural backgrounds. It can reach beyond age, abilities, cultures and expectation.

Sue encapsulated the thoughts of many of the participants in her final comment.

I want to plant the seeds that may be nurtured to grow in the future. They may grow in different gardens, but hopefully they will grow. Most importantly I hope they will like music. I enjoyed my early (albeit limited) exposure to music and I want others to have that opportunity. I am perhaps reliving my life through the children, I am aware that I feel I missed out on opportunities that many others had. I guess I want to expose children to the range that is out there so that they can make choices based on positive experiences.

Clearly all the participants in this investigation saw music as being an important part of the early childhood curriculum. The musical partnership between children and teachers is pivotal to optimising children's musical development (Levinowitz, 1998). The significance of their role in facilitating positive music experiences was evident in the discussions with the participants. Teachers and parents can make music important in children's lives by making it an important part of their own lives. Sharing genuine enjoyment while experiencing music will encourage children to feel the same (Hirt-Manheimer, 1995).

Pre-service teacher education music content

With the emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy, the Arts, as curriculum, have been given a much more reduced profile than in the past. There has long been an assumption that subjects like maths, science, and language require intelligence and are therefore ‘basic’, while other subjects like the arts “being rooted in bodily senses and attendant emotions” (Reimer, 1999, p. 39) are not intellectual and are therefore not to be considered basic (Reimer, 1999). Campbell and Scott-Kassner (1995) confirm that in the USA, music and the arts are seen as less central for cognitive and social development than numeracy and literacy in early childhood settings.

In Great Britain, Plummeridge (1991) suggests that there is perpetuated a view of the arts as unnecessary frills and distractions which get in the way of more serious curriculum subjects. Teachers involved in working in the arts are finding themselves in the position of having to cope with negative, and even antagonistic attitudes, since arts subjects are frequently regarded as being of only marginal value and significance to children’s learning (Plummeridge, 1991).

This has resulted in less music content being offered in teacher education programmes (Drummond, 1997). The research literature suggests that the dearth of music in pre-service teacher education programmes reinforces the fears of those who are not confident about things musical (Mansfield, 1995). Research carried out on entry to teacher education has revealed that music was ranked among the curriculum areas that student teachers least looked forward to teaching, a perception that had not changed at the end of the programme (Renwick & Vize, 1993).

Willberg (1999a) suggests that early childhood teachers are ill-prepared for offering qualitative music programmes; that those who do not have highly developed music skills are unable to develop a positive attitude towards this subject in the time available. This notion is supported by Ward (1999).

Music in many early childhood centres is being offered more through regular visits to the centres of ‘music people’, those who see themselves as having musical talent to share (Bridges, 1995). While these people can have music expertise, they often lack

the basic knowledge about child development and the teaching approaches that are needed in working with young children (Bridges, 1995; Scott-Kassner, 1999). The music experiences offered as a result may be developmentally inappropriate, and may be seen as something that 'others do', rather than the teachers in the centre.

Scott-Kassner (1999) asserts that music courses in pre-service teacher education should be no less than two semesters long and include a wide range of knowledge about music teaching and learning. "Certainly the early childhood educator is the adult most likely to introduce music into interactions with children. His or her musical training must be of high quality, as well as sufficient depth" (p.22). She recommends that course content should include a wide range of subjects, that would take into account the musical world and musical nature of the young child; the potential impact of music and the musical growth of the young child; working with at-risk children, developing music material that will optimise learning opportunities for children; and the role of the teacher in optimising children's musical development. (Scott-Kassner, 1999).

Scott-Kassner's (1999) recommendations provide a challenge for teacher educators and student teachers alike, especially since, in New Zealand, no teacher education provider has included musical skills as an entry requirement (Drummond, 1997). This lack of entry criteria, coupled with minimal course content, raises issues about what is musically possible in pre service teacher education courses. Elliott's (1995) vision that "to teach music effectively, a teacher must possess, embody, and exemplify musicianship" (p.40), would seem an impossible task for student teachers to achieve in the time frame available for music content.

The changes in moving to a more academic approach in early childhood programmes in colleges of education have resulted in the reduction of hours of music available to student teachers (Willberg, 1999b). It is very difficult for student teachers without existing music ability to develop the necessary skills in the time available (Ward, 1999; Willberg, 1999b).

For the participants of this study the experiences they had with music curriculum while gaining their qualifications were diverse and of varying influence. Three of the participants when discussing their teacher education did not refer to music experiences. Of the six who did make mention of their music education, their responses were in relation to their own musical self- concept.

Bu, already an accomplished musician, took opportunities offered to extend her musical horizons.

When I entered T-Col. [Teachers' College] I took music as a major and then I really got going in a sort of direction. Writing songs and looking at music in a different perspective was what I really got out of doing music at T-Col. I studied music more and developed my own style of music.

Music fan's pre-service teacher education programme was more fragmented and she believed that this might have been part of the reason for the lack of music education.

I guess it wasn't a huge part in my training. I guess that because mine was in bits and pieces. It wasn't the music module, it was never there, because we were all working and coming in once a week. I've never heard anywhere where music is a big thing.

Sam was not prepared for the reality of working in the field.

Going out and teaching was an eye opener. As a student, you're so naive and you don't get scared. When you get out there you don't realise how much you've got to learn, on your feet.

Sam also identified what she saw as a gap in the music education that she had while gaining her qualification.

It's too dangerous to say, "I don't know classical music", when it does so much, ...It opens doors not just for the children but opens another for parents and that's the exciting part that nobody told me at college that this would happen.

Sue's memories of music at college were negative and the feelings some twenty years later seem as strong now as they appeared then.

On entry to teachers college (as an adult student) we were asked to sing in front of everyone.... The best twelve got to play the guitar all the rest got to play the autoharp. I played the autoharp. Not exactly a vote of confidence.

Sue's negative memories continued.

Music at college was a pained affair with each of us always having to sing and play solo in front of the class. The class was after lunch so some of us would go to the pub in anticipation, but as the teacher always went in alphabetical order she always came to a particular student and focused on her to the point of torture and would rarely get to others in the class. Small blessing, but the anticipation was almost as bad.

Jan was disappointed by her lack of success in music during her college years but felt that the climate in the class clearly did not allow her to have any sense of achievement.

When I see the pleasure our son receives from playing the guitar I regret I did not persevere when I was at teachers' college. Our teacher at college was infectious, fun and encouraging. However, in the large group I felt "I cannot do this, I sound awful, I feel awful".

Peggy's experiences when she was a beginning teacher had quite devastating consequences for her playing the piano.

When I went to teachers' college I played the piano, had lessons again and they were going fine. Then I went into a kindergarten and that was the era of 'Brown Girl in the Ring' which had just come out and [another teacher] just goes to the piano and just plays it by ear. That was my first teaching practice and that was the end of it. I've never played it [the piano] again.

Clearly if one was musical, the music programme offered was a relatively easy one. For those who were not musical, however, it seems as though the music class was seen as one that had to be endured. For some participants the atmosphere was such that they did not feel comfortable to try and succeed. Their feeling of inadequacy is evident in their stories.

This sense of inadequacy is revealed in USA literature. Many early childhood educators feel incompetent as musicians or music makers. They contribute this sense of inadequacy to the lack of 'training' to implement a music-focused programme (Scott-Kassner, 1999).

Although Costa-Giomi et al., (1999) argue that music belongs in the core curriculum, in the current education climate, music is seen as less important than other curriculum subjects in teacher education programmes. A similar situation exists in teacher education programmes where, in general, music has been marginalised. Take for example the teacher education programme in which the research was carried out in relation to this literature review. In developing the new Bachelor of Education (Teaching), the number of hours given to the Arts disciplines (music, visual arts, dance and drama) in the qualification was drastically reduced. As a consequence of the reduction in the status of the Arts, student teachers perceive that music (and the Arts in general) is less important than the other curriculum areas (Anderson, 2003).

Implications for the future

Clearly, musical development of the child cannot be left to chance. It is dependent upon the leadership of teachers who are intrinsically motivated towards music, and who are able to plan for and create appropriate experiences to optimise children's musical development. This can only happen if those involved in learning and teaching within the early childhood education sector develop knowledge and skills in this curriculum area, are given the opportunity to gain musical experience, and are motivated towards developing a disposition for leadership and advocacy in music education (Beatty, 2000).

Campbell and Scott-Kassner (1995) stress the importance of music as a vehicle for teaching children ways of living their lives according to the essential values of a

culture. They also contend that research shows music is held in high esteem by a myriad of communities for its functional life-guiding and life-giving properties (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995). If it is understood that music is at the core of human thought and behaviour, it must logically follow that music must be placed at the heart of learning provided for children in schools. "Given that music is embraced by people everywhere for its unique qualities, to deny it a solid place in curricular studies would be a terrible mistake. Music is too powerful to be excluded from children's lives, whether in school or out" (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995).

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