Tasman Connections through Song: Engaging in Classrooms and in Community

Dawn Joseph Dr
Deakin University, djoseph@deakin.edu.au

Robyn Trinick Mrs
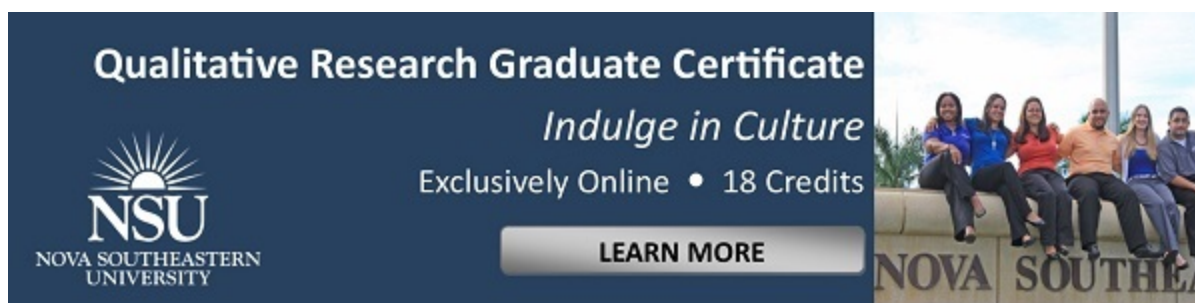*University of Auckland*, r.trinick@auckland.ac.nz

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Abstract

Community is an overarching word that encompasses people in formal and informal settings covering a broad range of activities. Engaging through sound "in community" and "as community" provides the opportunity for participants to come together making and sharing music through song. This paper focuses on voice (singing) across the Tasman within formal and informal locations. Author One draws on interview data within an "informal" space with three community choirs in regional Victoria (Australia) from her wider study Spirituality and Wellbeing: Music in the Community. The data shows that choir members use voice to connect with their local community around issues about social justice and the environment. The choir findings are reported under two overarching themes: connections to singing and wellbeing, and connections to community. Author Two uses narrative reflection as she focusses on the value of song with her generalist pre-service teacher's in a "formal" space within the Bachelor of Education (primary) programme at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. She explores the deeper meaning, and language features such as metaphor and personification that are evident in many songs and argues that songs provide a useful context for cultural and language learning. Her narrative is discussed under two overarching themes: benefits of singing, and social and linguistic connections. Though generalisations about singing across the Tasman cannot be made to other community or educational settings, we assert that singing is a powerful medium that can foster positive growth in education and community settings.

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Dawn Joseph
Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Robyn Trinick
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Community is an overarching word that encompasses people in formal and informal settings covering a broad range of activities. Engaging through sound "in community" and "as community" provides the opportunity for participants to come together making and sharing music through song. This paper focuses on voice (singing) across the Tasman within formal and informal locations. Author One draws on interview data within an "informal" space with three community choirs in regional Victoria (Australia) from her wider study Spirituality and Wellbeing: Music in the Community. The data shows that choir members use voice to connect with their local community around issues about social justice and the environment. The choir findings are reported under two overarching themes: connections to singing and wellbeing, and connections to community. Author Two uses narrative reflection as she focusses on the value of song with her generalist pre-service teacher's in a "formal" space within the Bachelor of Education (primary) programme at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. She explores the deeper meaning, and language features such as metaphor and personification that are evident in many songs and argues that songs provide a useful context for cultural and language learning. Her narrative is discussed under two overarching themes: benefits of singing, and social and linguistic connections. Though generalisations about singing across the Tasman cannot be made to other community or educational settings, we assert that singing is a powerful medium that can foster positive growth in education and community settings. Keywords: Singing, Community Music, Preservice Teachers, Higher Education, Cultural and Learning, Social Justice, Narrative Enquiry, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Introduction

This paper situates itself across the Tasman (the ocean that separates Australia and New Zealand) where both authors (Dawn and Robyn) undertake music teaching, and research in higher education and in the wider community. As tertiary music educators and performing practitioners, we use the word "community" to embrace education settings and community settings where teaching and learning takes place within "formal and informal" contexts. Green (2014) points out that though societies and educational institutes have formal and informal ways of teaching and learning, she firmly believes that music is learnt through a progression of engagement in music and music making. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the two, we agree with Wright (2016) and Green (2014) that some settings use a blend of formal and informal teaching. In our different, yet similar, teaching spaces across the Tasman, we value and include music knowledge, skills and understanding that are both constructed and emergent in our classroom practice and in our community engagement. In this

paper, we focus on "voice" (singing) in our teaching and research. Humans "in community" and "as community" have been making music for ten thousand years according to archaeological evidence (British Broadcasting Corporation BBC, 2014). To date, there is no known consensus on what the term "community music" means. Research shows there is "some resistance to theorising it" (McKay & Higham, 2011, p. 5). We agree that the word community may mean different things to different people in different contexts. In Australia, the word community music existed before the term was coined (Harrison, 2010). In New Zealand, community music involves group making music, and aims to "…establish intergenerational, cross-gender friendships and community; affirm their identities in an LGBTQI space; and educate by representing diversity during a period of greater political equity and social assimilation" (Bird, 2017, p. 193). In both countries, the idea of community music implies, in most cases, access to music opportunities that are free of charge, or have minimal fees, and are dependent on voluntary teachers who are prepared to set up and run groups for the "common good" where people engage in music for the sake of music than make money (Rimmer, 2009).

We concur that community music embraces the making and sharing of music where people gather in different places and spaces (Bartleet, Dunbar-Hall, Letts, & Schippers, 2009; Gordon, & Gibson, 2017; Veblen, 2013). Community, Veblen (2007, p. 9) argues, is not "geographically situated, culturally based, artistically concerned, re-created, virtual, imagined, or otherwise" Rather, community is a fluid concept that allows people to engage, experience, explore and enjoy sounds (vocal, instrumental, and electronic) in various genres, styles and languages across age groups, languages and cultures. The act of coming together promotes more than "musical excellence and innovation," it also creates "opportunities to construct personal and communal expressions of artistic, social, political, and cultural concerns that improve quality of life for communities" (Cohen, 2016, p. iii). Hence, music participation "in community" and "as community" provides an opportunity for people to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection (Kenny, 2016).

As music educators belonging to a community of practitioners, we agree that that learning is socially situated (Wenger, 1998), hence we share a passion for what we in order to "do it better" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). As singing is core to our remit, we contend that singing is for all, not only the talented. People across the ages from all parts of the globe have engaged in singing as a way to communicate (Chapman, 2006). The participatory act of singing in formal or informal settings offers members a space to connect in meaningful ways (Ansdell, 2004; Gridley, Astbury, Sharples & Aguirre, 2011; Lenette, Weston, Wise, Sunderland, & Bristed, 2015; Schippers, 2010). Singing, Welch (1994, p. 3) points out, is "a complex web of interacting factors embracing perception, cognition, physical development, maturation, society, culture, history and intentionality" It brings together language, physiology, and acoustics in the service of art" (Miller, 2005, p. 235). In formal settings, within teacher education programs, singing connects musical knowledge and practice where "music learning and language learning share enacted practices of doing wherein people participate within a sociocultural community" (Brashier, 2016, p. 78). In informal settings, singing in community choirs can be used as a powerful medium to promote social matters of inclusion (Welch, Himonides, Saunders, Papageorgi, & Sarazin, 2014).

In this paper, we focus on singing within formal and informal milieus. We contend that singing may serve as an effective platform that gives "voice" to participants where the use of lyrics as shared text gives meaning to singer and audience. In "informal" settings, they sing about things that matter in community (social justice, the environment, same sex marriage), and in "formal" settings, songs provide a basis for children's literacy and language learning and promotes cultural understanding.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In all societies, "voice" is at the heart of communication, most effective through speech and song. In a young child's world, singing is as natural as speaking (Wan, Ruber, Hohmann, & Schlaug, 2010) where speech, in itself, is musical in character. Consequently, when children sing, they learn to communicate confidently and fluently through speech (Barrett, 2009; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). As such, the natural rhythms inherent in songs and rhymes, and the regulated breathing and vocal intensity involved in singing that enables fluency and control over the voice, often eliminates pauses or stumbles in speech (Maess, Koelsch, Gunter, & Freiderici, 2001; O'Herron, 2006; Wan et al., 2010). Song has long been considered the most human form of musical expression (Maess et al., 2001; Schoepp, 2001).

A broad singing repertoire provides a useful learning context for language concepts and new vocabulary, while strengthening reading skills (Hill-Clarke & Robinson, 2002). Music provides a familiar and engaging context in which children are exposed to vocabulary and different genres of language and different cultural contexts (Cunningham & Allington, 2011; Schoepp, 2001; Trinick & Joseph, 2017). Songs often provide rich information about human relations, ethics, customs and culture, which fosters the development of cultural literacy (Abrate, 1983; Beasley & Chuang, 2008). The inclusion of popular songs in singing repertoire acknowledges the communication landscape of the students, which, when connected to language learning, offers huge potential for learning (Beasley & Chuang, 2008). This may help students connect with the text, leading to increased self-confidence and language acquisition (Freeman & Freeman, 2003), providing a "real world communicative advantage" (Salcedo, 2010, p. 19).

As well as the linguistic, cognitive and affective benefits associated with singing (Barrett, 1990; diEdwardo, 2005; Schoepp, 2001), songs can be a conduit for important messages to the community such as those relating to issues about social justice (Burr, 2017; Hempkin, 2016). By raising consciousness of song lyrics, we can foster awareness of social contexts where human connectedness promotes a shared bonding and communication of identity and language (Barrett & Westerlund, 2017). Through song, people generally bond together because of common interests and purposes – for example, to make statements about socio-political decisions such as climate change or marriage inequality. Langston and Barrett (2008) found in their research that choirs could serve as strong community resources where there are mutual benefits for the whole community as music making. Song gives people a voice to sing "about issues of peace, social justice, and equality" (Walker, 2009). This was evident in an Italian's women's choir where performing for a benefit concert about social justice resonated with the choir members as they themselves were migrants (Southcott & Joseph, 2015). The voice through song has also had made cultural and linguistic connections (Joseph, 2016; Trinick & Dale, 2015), and adds to the social and cultural tapestry of a community where words have the power to educate, connect, and influence people in society (Veblen & Olsson, 2002).

Research has shown that singing offers social, mental, health and community benefits (Clift & Morrison, 2011; Cohen, 2006; Morrison & Clift, 2012). Davidson (2011, p. 84) has established that school singing programmes can offer "effective means of providing social connection, musical, physical and emotional experiences, all of which satisfy the needs of the participants and lead to a positive impact on wellbeing" Many reports have been written on the improved levels of social connectedness that singing offers to participants in choirs which enhances their sense of belonging (Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, & McQueen, 2014; Gordon, 2012). In addition, research has shown that singing activities may be seen as a therapeutic tool to enhance stress levels (Bailey & Davidson, 2003; Clift & Hancox, 2001; Gridley et al., 2011). Singing has provided therapeutic outcomes for children and adolescents (Kreutz, Clift, &

Bossinger, 2015; McFerran-Skewes, 2004). Though this aspect is not the focus of our paper, we do agree that singing can have a positive effect on changing people's moods (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2005; Hillman, 2002). Some research shows "singing and its effects on health and wellbeing is dedicated to the ways singing affects and benefits individuals rather than groups or communities" (Gridley et al., 2011, p. 34). Bailey and Davidson (2003) found in their study that singers gained the most health benefits from group singing. In a 2014 study, Weinberg & Joseph (2017), found participating in music (singing) improves individual wellbeing and contributed to their happiness. In both formal and informal settings, it is evident that singing brings much happiness in community and classroom settings.

Author One: Dawn as Researcher and Music Educator

I am formerly from South Africa (Johannesburg), where community music was a rich part of my daily life. I taught in formal and informal settings and was an active member of choirs and a church musician before moving to Australia in 2000. In 2001, when I started to teach music at Deakin University I continued my community music teaching and performing. At the university I introduced multicultural music especially that of African into my teaching units (subjects). By experiencing and engaging in a new and different music like that of African, my predominantly Anglo-Australian students had a richer understanding of different people, their music, culture and history (see for example Joseph, 2005, 2011, 2016). I also conducted and accompanied the South African choir in Melbourne for a few years, where we performed South African songs to the local community, at churches, and at music festivals. I continue to play the organ and teach new hymns at my local church hence my interest in choirs outside of my university teaching has been ongoing as it contributes to my professional and personal growth.

As a non-white person living through the years of apartheid in South Africa I experienced how music served as a powerful platform to give voice to the people. Through song, local and international artist wrote and sang about the anti-apartheid struggle which played a significant role in bringing about change and democracy to the country. Though this is not the focus of this paper, my ongoing interest in the power of music and words motivated me to undertake a wider study "Spirituality and Wellbeing: Music in the Community." I chose Warrnambool (a regional town in Melbourne) because my university has a campus in the area. I also taught an intensive course at that campus and heard about the choirs in the area. Thereafter, I invited them to participate in my wider study. My study investigated why people come together to share music making and practice, it explored how people learn music within community settings and how music and spirituality fosters well-being in community settings. As I lived through change in South Africa and when I undertook this study I realized how powerful words and songs can be in Australia. It can impact, influence and shape understandings and promote awareness around many issues such as social justice and inclusion.

Author Two: Robyn as Researcher and Music Educator

I was born and raised in Auckland, New Zealand, where I have lived virtually all my life. I had a musically privileged upbringing, with many years of piano lessons, exams and performances. While I am grateful for my well-disciplined piano background, there were negative aspects to my own music learning which have impacted on my current music education philosophy and practice. Examples of this are an inclusive view of music, education, an emphasis on "process" as well as "product" and a respect for the different forms of "music capital" that individuals bring to a range of education settings.

From 1979 – 1988, I taught in a low decile primary school, in a predominantly Pasifika community. This experience was humbling and eye-opening. I realized that my musical world was very different from the musical worlds of the children I was teaching, and I had as much to learn. Song was a fundamental aspect of my teaching that clearly had many benefits, and I grew to realize that music was much more than reading notes and putting on performances. During this period, I met and married my husband, who is Māori, and my life was enriched through enculturation into a family that was very different from my own. In 1989, with two young sons, I was appointed to the role of music educator at Auckland Teachers' Training College (later to be renamed the College of Education, and now the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland). One of the challenges for me in this position was to work in inclusive ways that built confidence and self-belief in my preservice teachers who come from a range of cultural backgrounds. I use song to help build their confidence, and music competencies skills as well as learn about more about Māori culture and language. I stress the importance of the use of song in classroom teaching as a way to learn language and meaning (see Trinick & Dale, 2015). My lived experience of Māori culture has enabled me to work in culturally responsive ways that embrace diversity and inclusion, particularly through song. Hence my interest to work with Dawn in exploring connections through song in formal and informal settings.

Methodology

We employed qualitative methodology, using narrative reflection, observation, anecdotal feedback and interview data to inform our reflection. Our narrative is a way "to revise, modify and refine their [our] expertise" (Finlay, 2008, p. 4), and it exists "between the tales we live and the tales we tell" (Geelan, 2003, p. 8). Educational researchers like ourselves tell our stories as "both phenomenon and method," where phenomenon is the "story" and inquiry is the "narrative" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). We situate our experience within our everyday life-worlds of practice, practitioner and researcher (Jasper, 2005).

Dawn draws on interview data with three choirs from Warrnambool (regional Victoria) as part of her wider project Spirituality and Wellbeing: Music in the Community. In this paper, she focuses on why people come together to share music making. In 2014, three choir directors were invited to participate in the project. Having gained ethical approval through her institution (Deakin University's Human Ethics Advisory Group) she emailed the three choir directors the Plain Language Statement and Consent form (PLSCF). The PLSCF explained the project and included some sample focus group interview questions such as: Why do you sing in the choir? What do you enjoy? What do you find challenging? What contribution does the choir make to the community? Has the singing impacted on your wellbeing? In May 2014, Dawn spent a week in Warrnambool attending choir's rehearsals, talking to members of the choir and also undertaking three separate focus group interviews with Choir A, B and C. All together there 28 people volunteered. Dawn also conducted interviews with the three conductors. Claire (director of Choir A), John and Peter (joint conductors of Choir B, Peter conducted Choir C). The interviews for each of the choirs took place after the rehearsal as this suited the volunteers in terms of time and venue. Those that wished to participate stayed on after the rehearsal. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the choir director and participants. All interviewees signed a consent form before the interview took place. The interviews across all choirs were conversational and semi-structured in manner. Dawn generally began asking each of the choirs "when did this choir start?" which lead to "what made you join this group?" followed by "what do you sing?" and why do you think it is important to sing?' For the choir directors she asked, "what made you start the choir?" "what do you bring to the choir?" and "what difference can the choir make to the local community?" The focus group and choir director interviews were approximately 60 minutes each, they were professionally transcribed

and sent back for confirmation. As a follow up to the initial interviews in 2014, Dawn visited the choir directors in Warrnambool between 2014-2017.

Robyn draws on her observation notes, journal entries and remembered anecdotal feedback from her students to inform her narrative. She behaves in an ethical manner by masking individual identities as no names of students were used. In addition, she reflects on written student course and lecturer anonymous evaluations that are completed in two-year cycles. She does not require ethical oversight to use her own reflective teacher journal notes. Rather, she explores deeper meaning, and language features such as metaphor and personification evident in songs and which she shares in her findings. This qualitative, interpretive approach enables the researcher to draw on tacit knowledge (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), to make sense of phenomenon, and to articulate their findings in meaningful ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In qualitative research, the researcher is able to capture from the "inside" the "personal-self becomes the researcher 'self'" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182).

We used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as an analytical strategy to help code our data. When using IPA, the researcher has to listen, understand and trust the participants voice when interpreting the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2004). Working across the Tasman through email and telephone communication, we initially read and re-read our raw data independently initially making notes of our keywords which aligns with IPA procedures (Shaw, 2010; Smith, 2017) We then shared our de-identified data by having robust face-to-face discussions (Robyn came to Melbourne July for a few days and Dawn went to Auckland November 2017 for a few days). These meetings helped us synthesize, interpret and organize our data (Eatough & Smith, 2006; Mawson, Berry, Murray, & Hayward, 2011). We looked for dissonances and confluences before we finalised our overarching themes for our research sites (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). We use direct quotations to support our theme analysis which is presented as two separate milieus (Dallos & Vetere, 2006).

Findings

In this section of the paper we discuss singing in two different milieus, one with choirs in Australia (informal community setting) and the other with students in New Zealand, within a formal setting.

The Australian Milieu

The membership of the three choirs are mostly retired Anglo-Australian with some still working. They sing a variety of songs from a range of genres and give at least two concerts a year. The members meet weekly in spaces such as a community hall, church hall, or church and rehearse for approximately 1hour. The findings are reported under two overarching themes (connections to singing and wellbeing, and connections to community).

Connections to Singing and Wellbeing

Members sang for a variety of reasons, mostly for "fun" and simply "for the love of it." One member in Choir B said, "I can't imagine life without singing or music," and Claire the conductor of Choir A found music was something that most people had in common, she added "and with it you then got all these friends, so you come together to sing" Members sang together for a number of years which as a member of Choir B pointed out creates "a sense of community and a sense of enjoyment and you meet a lot of people who share the same values as you." Another added, "I got interested in the potential of what a choir can do for a community and

also to raise awareness on the specific issues that we were very concerned about." Singing provides a platform for members in the choirs to have fun and maintain friendships. This was evident when hearing about eight members who drove weekly for 30min each way for a rehearsal. A strong sense of connection was central to membership as a member from Choir A said, "through song we communicate together" Communication was not only about "singing in a different language" rather, it meant being part of a community of singers. This was confirmed by a member of Choir C who felt "singing gives you a sense of community and a sense of enjoyment and you meet a lot of people who share the same values as you" Singing "in community" also extended to the local society as a member from Choir A pointed out singing "as community" "enriches their lives [the audience] if they come to a concert…I think it gives them a chance of reflection because we sing songs that they can remember from their youth or they're learning something different so it enhances their life too." In the main, all members across the choirs agreed that singing contributed to their personal wellbeing. Words such as "it adds to the quality of my life" "it is good for my mental health" and "it relaxes me" confirms the uplifting feeling it provides. For choir membership, singing positively impacted on the groups wellbeing as some mentioned it combats social isolation. One member from Choir A said, "I came because I was sad. I lost my husband and yeah singing here has really made a difference" and another found when she attends the rehearsals, "you forget everything else when you're involved and concentrating on your singing" hence singing with others as a member from Choir B echoed "puts me in a good mood."

Connections to Community

Peter, the conductor of Choir B firmly believed the choir was an effective platform for getting local people interested in real matters through song. He feels he is called to serve in his vocation as a priest hence thought through singing the choir membership "can create some change" about issues that matter. He added "maybe people don't care or are not thinking about it" though through singing about it "they sort of get touched and are made to think again in a different way" He felt very strongly that "though you're banging your head up against a brick wall talking to the politicians in this government and all of that…change comes through creative arts and stuff like that, that's where you can change people's views" Choir B had a strong sense of connection to the wider community as Peter found people joined the choir to sing about issues concerning the environment, climate change, and matters about social justice (for example refuges, marriage equality). He said, "learning about the environment may come from the conversation, there's unity building of that and getting to know each other as people" Recently (July 2017) when I spoke to all three conductors they collectively felt that the choirs can "impact attitudes" hence they "pay careful attention to repertoire" A member from Choir A felt through listening and hearing the words "music actually reaches whatever people like to call their core, their soul" Choir B found "through publicity in the newspaper reaching out to the wider community has been good from our point of view, just giving it a positive spin. I think it gave good feedback for the refugee event and it was supportive of the choir" Peter recently wrote songs called "Stop Adani" which relates to the coal mine issue in Queensland and about "Marriage Equality" a "hot topic" in Australia at the time of writing this paper as the marriage equality postal plebiscite was underway. Other songs that related to social justice included "Peace Must Come," "They'll Call Australia Home," "Find That Hope," and "We Shall Overcome." Words have a powerful meaning which connects people and cements their sense of belonging in community and as community.

The New Zealand Milieu

The Bachelor of Education (Primary) students range from their early twenties to early sixties, they also vary in ethnicity with the majority as New Zealand European/Pakeha, some Asian, Pasifika and the minority Māori. From student evaluations, both formal and informal, students spoke of enjoyment of, and appreciation of the value of music and singing in their music education classes. Author two's narrative is discussed under two overarching themes (benefits of singing, and social and linguistic connections).

Benefits of Singing

Many students enter music education courses with preconceived ideas about their own musicality, based on personal experiences and levels of confidence, and tend to label themselves as "singers" or "non-singers." This generates a sense of "have and have-nots" in relation to singing a "myth" that is discussed in music classes that is soon overcome when students realise they have the ability to sing. While short courses are not adequate to make huge shifts in the development of singing skills, the focus is on building confidence in group settings. At the end of each module, there are usually several students who comment on their shift in attitude regarding music, particularly singing. Swain and Bodkin-Allen (2017) recently found that singing in groups had significant impact on levels of confidence in early childhood teachers. Similarly, my students mentioned the degree of enjoyment and satisfaction they gained from group singing. One student commented:

> I entered this course feeling sick with nerves. My music experiences in the past have been negative, and my confidence was shattered in high school. This course has helped me view music from a whole new perspective, and I will definitely be getting the kids I teach to sing every day.

Though many students are initially reluctant to sing, group singing was found to be a familiar and pleasurable experience. The building of a "singing community" in the music class deepens my students' understanding in cognitive (critical thinking and reflexivity) and relational (communication and relationship building) domains (Delany et al., 2017). This in turn connects to key principles identified in the New Zealand Curriculum (Minister of Education, 2007) including confidence, connectedness, active involvement, and lifelong learning. By shifting the emphasis away from the "art of singing" to the "value of song," students appear to be less anxious about the act of singing. Through the building of a singing "community" in formal class settings, students are able to construct their own meaning from the experience. This is important given the range of cultural diversity within the class, and the experience enhances their cultural and linguistic understanding.

Cultural and Linguistic Connections

Each music education class begins with an opening *waiata* (song in Māori), a practice that serves a number of socio-cultural and socio-lingual purposes. The *waiata* is an essential component of music education. Singing *waiata* is a positive way of enacting *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Treaty of Waitangi) requirements, in terms of both language and ritual. Singing *waiata* for particular purposes provides context and meaning, enabling the participants to understand the underlying messages of songs, deepening their understanding of the words and associated protocols (Trinick & Dale, 2015). The choice of *waiata* requires careful consideration, considering the constraints of contact time with students, and coverage of levels

and purposes. At an emergent level, *waiata* may be used to teach basic language concepts such as numbers, colours, animal sounds, parts of the body, and/or different forms of greetings. (Trinick & Dale, 2015). For example, the following *waiata,* gives learners an opportunity to practise a basic conversation, and is sung to the familiar tune of "Frere Jacques":

Solo singer: *Tena koutou, tena koutou*   (Greetings to you all)
Group response: *Tena koe, tena koe*   (Greetings to one person)
Solo singer: *Kei te pehea koutou? Kei te pehea koutou?*   (How are you all?)
Group response: *Kei te pai, kei te pai*   (Fine)

At a more sophisticated level, some *waiata* incorporate language features such as metaphor. For example, "*Whakarongo ake au"* composed by John Tapiata:

Whakarongo rā   (I listen)
Whakarongo ake au   (I listen)
Ki te tangi a te manu   (A bird's cry rings out)
E rere runga rawa e   (It flies up high)
Tui, tui, tui, tuia   (Sew, stitch, bind it together)

The idea of birds singing together is a metaphor for unity, creating a feeling of community. In this way, it also resonates with the diverse range of students in the class (age and ethnicity), singing "as a community" of Bachelor of Education (Primary) students.

As well as singing opening *waiata,* song is used in a number of ways in music education classes. Songs involving movement strengthens group cohesion, as students participate in activities that some recall from their own childhood such as "Going on a Bear Hunt" (Rosen, 2000). By enacting the words of a story through movement, students see how they can lead children to a deeper level of thinking and feeling in relation to the words. This classic book has also been adapted to suit the New Zealand context in Patrick McDonald's book "Going on a Moa Hunt" (McDonald, 2015).

We're going on a moa hunt. We're not scared.
We're going to catch a BIG one. We're NOT scared!
Uh-oh . . . a tangly forest!
CRACK, CREAK, SNAP!

As well as the rhythm and pitch associated with these words, visual text provides symbols to represent dynamics, and the onomatopoeia lends itself to both movement and sound exploration.

While the practice of using songs to foster language learning particularly in junior classrooms is regarded as an effective way to help children learn, such practices are not necessarily carried out with any real understanding of associated theoretical pedagogy (Macias, 2008). A well-recognised example I employ, which is certainly not exclusive to New Zealand, is to learn the English alphabet by singing it to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" The majority of students are familiar with this song, which provides a familiar and "safe" starting point. By drawing attention to the value of song as a powerful mnemonic device, the scene is set for recognising that learning through song has far more depth than is commonly recognised (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Foley, 2006). Language acquisition is dependent on procedural memory and song plays an important role in retention. The "fun factor" associated with singing is, on one hand, an added bonus, but, on the other hand, tends to make educators somewhat guarded in terms of its value. Course evaluation comments from students indicate a shift in

their regard for the value of classroom singing. One student said, "I have never thought about song this way" Another student remarked "I see now that all the stuff I learnt from memory has been sung. We just thought we were singing for fun!" One of the main goals in music education is to emphasise the value of singing, and other music experiences, to help make classrooms positive learning environments where children thrive academically, socially and emotionally, essential if children are to be operating at optimal functioning levels (Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Wylie & Foster-Cohen, 2007).

Synthesis of the Data

In this study, data was gathered from a range of participants in two contrasting settings. In setting A (the Australian milieu), participants were in singing groups of their own volition in a community setting through an informal learning context, while in setting B (the New Zealand milieu), participants were undertaking compulsory courses involving group participation in singing, in an education setting through a formal learning context. Despite the differences in context and motivation, some common themes emerged through the data about the many and varied benefits and purposes of group singing. Across both settings, our data shows that singing made people feel good, regardless of whether songs sung were new or old. The singing experience in both our settings created a strong sense of connection to membership. Songs in setting B were used to create group cohesion which was similar to setting A though in setting A songs were used as an effective platform to strengthen community cohesion on matters in relation to raising awareness about issues around social justice. It was evident that the choice of songs was a key and common theme in both settings as it served as a way to learn about the power of words, its influence and impact on self and on others as a group. Choir members and students alike felt a sense of comaraderie when they sang together. As well as making connections with each other, they enjoyed the aesthetic experience and, for many, singing in a group served as a way to build their confidence. The classroom and the choir settings serves as a space to meet new people and make new friend or strengen old frienships. This common perception in both sets of data highlights a sense of community through group singing.

As the paper was set up to synthesise rather than compare two different settings per se, it was evident that the choir members in setting A had more singing experience than the students in setting B. In setting A participants were mostly retired, hence their level of confidence and commitment was far different to the students (setting B) who came into the course havinng no option but to learn to sing as it form an part of music education and thir teacher education programme. The time of the rehearsals for singing was different, the choirs met in the evenings to rehearse, whereas the students met during the day. The outcomes to perform and achieve were also different for both settings as the notion of singing in setting B was used as a pedagogical tool, whereas this was not necessarily the case for setting A. Although choir members in setting A did engage in learning how to sing and had the opportunity to compose their own songs, they were not assessed, nor did they have to pass the course like the studenst in setting B. Yet across both settings participants engaged in memorising the tune, learnt words and, in some instances, sang in unfamiliar languages which they found expanded their repertoire and helped strengthened memory. Form the data, learning about a different cultural context through song was enriching and also having excellent teaching in terms of the conductors and the msuic educator cultivates a good learning environment, whilst also having fun. In both settings, it was found that learning new songs sometimes took people our of their comfort zones. For example, in setting A, choir members sang songs around same sex marriage, and in setting B, students sang Māori songs. Overall, through our data and discussion in both our different settings, we found words have the power

to help shape lingistic, cultural, and social understandings which may influence meaning and change perceptions about having a voice and giving voice. In both sets of data, we found that songs were highly valued. This aspect resonates closely with our personal passion for and about music.

Discussion

Singing plays an essential part in the social fabric of any society where community involvement through sound gives voice for participants to come together to share a sense of belonging and connectedness. In our research, we identified that singing connects people "in community" and "as community," it offers members validation and affirmation (Davidson et al., 2014; Southcott & Joseph, 2012). The "space and place" provides a safe environment for choir members and students alike to bond with each other and the community. Generally, members in the choir felt singing made them "feel happy," they "forget their troubles," and it improved their "mood" which positively contributes to their sense of wellbeing (Bungay & Skingley, 2008; Clift et al., 2010). Similarly, students expressed surprise at how positive the group singing experiences were, this was mainly based on their feelings about singing before entering the course. In a course evaluation, one student aptly summed this up by saying "I have not considered singing to be enjoyable for many years ever since I got rejected from the school choir two years in a row" Thus, it is important to promote inclusive practice that fosters musical growth than marginalises or silences potential.

As a community of singers (choir or students), participants "commit themselves to the well-being of each other and the integrity and well-being of the group" (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 12). Singing offers participants validation and affirmation (Davidson et al., 2014; Southcott & Joseph, 2012), thus the socialisation aspect of singing promotes feelings of well-being by providing opportunities for participants to be part of a cohesive group, and to contribute at their own levels of comfort (Humpal & Wolff, 2003). In a "world of earbuds and personal digital recording studios" (Kratus, 2007, p. 44), the role of music in promoting socialisation is particularly important. Hence, Author two in her teaching is challenged to provide students with opportunities to that includes singing as generalist teachers they will be expected to teach in all areas of the curriculum in "a context where young children are arguably at their most musical, combined with teachers who often have little or no specifically musical training" (Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2017, p. 110). For the students, they felt they gained a positive experience from singing, they made new friends and connected across age groups and ethnicities. In addition, they learnt about language concepts and new vocabulary. The ritual of singing *waiata* helps shift the emphasis from the skill of the singer to the celebration of sung messages.

Words can be used in powerful ways to help promote understandings of respect, cultural responsiveness and tolerance in educational and community settings (Joseph & Trinick, 2016). In both formal and informal settings, we found the lyrics of songs forms an important connection as shared text for choir members and students. Songs sung in other languages provides a learning opportunity that extends beyond music skills to that of cultural and social awareness (Bartleet et al., 2009). In the case of the Choir B, singing in English when composing songs surrounding social justice (marriage equality, refugees, asylum seekers, racism, indigenous people and reconciliation) and the environment (water pollution, deforestation, sustainability, climate change) fostered a greater awareness of the issues amongst members and the wider society. This is similar to the students singing, playing and moving to Eddy Grant's song "Gimme Hope, Joanna" though a catchy song, students were surprised when they looked more deeply at the lyrics of the song, "Joanna" represents a personification of Johannesburg, where the central theme of the song is about apartheid in South Africa. The words chosen for

songs provides a learning context for looking at the impact of syntax in both formal and informal learning milieus. The choir members wanted to connect with their local community through singing performances, and for Choir B, songs served as an effective platform to promote matters surrounding social justice and the environment. For students, group singing promoted social cohesion, enhanced confidence and served as a pedagogical tool for cultural and language learning.

Conclusion

Singing in formal and informal settings offers social, musical, mental health and community benefits. The notion of community is a fluid concept that allows people to engage, experience, explore and enjoy music from a range of genres, languages and cultures across all age groups in community settings and within preservice teacher programmes. We acknowledge that this paper only presents voices from three choirs in a regional town in Australian and includes a narrative reflection from an academic about her teaching at one university in New Zealand, thus a limitation in itself. Therefore, generalisations to other choirs in the community or in to music education classes in education settings (universities or schools) cannot be made. Singing across the Tasman plays an essential part in building community. It provides opportunities for participants to come together to share a sense of belonging and connectedness. In our research, we identified that singing connects people "in community" and "as community." Our discourse adds to the body of literature that shows ways in which singing is a powerful medium that may engender growth in education settings and in the wider community. We acknowledge that there are likely to be aspects in our paper that may resonate with teaching and learning in other context and welcome interchange with choir director's and music educator's in community and education settings. Further research needs to be undertaken across the Tasman that investigates whether music (through song) in formal and informal settings promotes language learning as Balkin (1999) claims, "the most powerful, personal, pleasurable, and above all, permanent tool in our pedagogical arsenal" (p. 1). We would also need to further investigate the cultural connections and understandings singers (students or choir members) gain through song and how this might influence audience perceptions relating to social justice.

In our research, we have shown that singing matters. We need to create more opportunities across educational and community settings for singing to thrive. Without song, our world will be much silenced. Ongoing research across the Tasman, in community and educational settings, is needed to further explore the potential contribution singing can make for the individual, the group and the wider community.

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Author Note

Dr. Dawn Joseph is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University (Australia). She teaches in undergraduate and postgraduate programs and is a member of the editorial boards of international and national refereed journals. Her research and publications focus on: teacher education, music education, community music, African music, cultural diversity, and ageing and well-being in the Arts. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: djoseph@deakin.edu.au.

Robyn Trinick is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland (New Zealand). She teaches in undergraduate programs in both early childhood and primary sectors. Robyn maintains strong links with primary schools in the community. She publishes in national and international journals and presents at local and international conferences. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: r.trinick@auckland.ac.nz.

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