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EDITORIAL

Perspectives on early childhood music: Guest Editorial

It is a privilege, and also a responsibility, to have been invited to edit this special issue that focuses on music in early childhood. Although I frequently complain that early childhood music is, too often, hived off to stand alone in separate conference sessions, sections of handbooks or single issues of journals such as this one – instead of being integrated – I would never turn down an opportunity to put early childhood centre stage. More than that, I was given a free hand by the journal editors and able to invite authors to contribute articles for this issue. My decisions about the topics and who to ask to write were guided by a number of criteria that will become clearer as you read through this editorial.

However, before I go on to introduce the articles that follow, I will discuss some general issues facing the field of early childhood music education. Notice, for a start, that the sector must clearly define itself as 'early childhood' because by default the generic term *music education* assumes children of school age and tends to centre children of upper primary (elementary)/lower secondary age. I look forward to when a focus issue on, say, curriculum or children's composing, would be viewed as glaringly incomplete if it did not include discussion of children from birth. The marginalisation of the sector is, at core, an issue of inclusion. Inclusion in music education is considered with reference to the more familiar hierarchies of race, class, gender and (dis)ability. But it is not considered with reference to age, except perhaps when thinking about learning across the lifespan into old age. Yet ageism applies to the youngest children who, as I have argued at length elsewhere (see Young, 2020a), are routinely stereotyped, accorded less value and marginalised on the basis of their age and immature physical abilities. The dominance of developmentalism, still holding strong in music education thinking, has constructed the very youngest children as close to nature, as lacking and 'not yet' musically formed according to criteria drawn from the musical activity of older children and adults. Developmental theory has come in for harsh criticism and has been superseded in much educational thinking, particularly in early childhood (Burman, 2016). These outdated constructions of early musical childhood need to change to images of competence and positive potentials (see Young, 2018).

Another reason why the sector is typically set apart is because it sits outside of the formal structures of schooling. It takes place in a multiplicity of contexts that have varying aims, purposes, structurings and so on, as will be illustrated in the articles that follow. Mainstream discussions of music education typically assume common structures of institutionalised school provision: the dedicated lesson time, a class of same age children and the lead teacher. So the common frameworks which can be assumed in discussions and debates about school-based music education, do not apply; or at least, only in modified form. The distinctiveness of the early childhood sector would complicate those discussions and so the easiest path is simply to exclude. Authors who have contributed to this issue would, if asked, describe themselves as teachers, early childhood practitioners, community musicians or performer/creators. The field of early childhood music embraces the diversity of their work and its varying characteristics and purposes. The absence of formal schooling with its assumed structures means that music with, for and by the youngest children in its multi-faceted forms is the connecting thread through community music provision, arts/performance occasions, free play daycare provision and music at home. If early childhood has one thing that it might model for music education intended for older children it is this interconnection, fluidity and adaptability of practice. While I certainly would not claim that the early

childhood sector has achieved integration, I would suggest there is greater coherence between music made at home, music in settings focussed on learning, community music and performance occasions and that the connecting thread is the focus on musical childhoods.

In comparison with music education for older children, the field is relatively new, particularly in the expansion of practice to under 3-year-olds. Therefore the practice-based research and scholarship, although there is much excellent work, cannot benefit from the historical legacy of breadth and depth that underpins practice in other sectors. There has been a tendency to take shortcuts by simply scaling down classroom-based approaches that are appropriate to older children and applying them to young children, rather than 'scale up' from babyhood and take the time to design appropriate approaches through research and reflection. Much work still needs to be done and special issues such as this one contribute to that work. One article that follows, for example, focuses on a project that developed pedagogy in daycare with babies, a prime example of 'scaling up'.

The early childhood education sector as a whole has a strong identity and ideology rooted in its sensitivity to children as individuals, their identities and needs. It holds on to a pedagogy firmly rooted in a holistic approach that supports young children to learn through play. The emphasis is on experiential, holistic learning that encompasses affective, aesthetic, emotional, and social learning. Music education professionals in early childhood look across to colleagues in the wider early childhood sector and are inspired and emboldened by this ideology and the pedagogies and practices it fosters. There is a strong emphasis on observation to attempt to understand the child's musicality and to consider how to extend and build on that musicality though play and play-based pedagogies, rather than a pre-determined, subject-centred approach for teaching music formally. At a time when global perspectives in education, including music education, are increasingly mediated by an instrumental discourse associated with standardised notions of knowledge acquisition, the early childhood sector can offer oases of alternative thinking that I think all music education colleagues could find valuable.

It is also often unacknowledged that work with the youngest children involves accompanying adults. Self-evidently babies and toddlers are dependent on full-time carers. Articles in this issue focus on making music with under-3 s, and so women are a strong presence: respondents to the survey from New Zealand, the foster mothers in Newcastle, the minority ethnic mothers who sing lullabies and the daycare workers. Until childcare is more equitably shared between men and women, it is women who are full-time carers and predominantly occupy young children's musical worlds as birth/foster mothers or professional carers. Stating that fact is not to deny that fathers or male daycare workers do not attend music sessions or that they are not capable of caring. The carer is then an active participant and the work is dyadic, for baby or small child with adult. 'Who is the song for?' asks one participant in the Lullabies project: a pertinent question. Music as care work by women for women as well as the children they care for is a theme that courses through these articles.

Ageism and unhelpful constructions of young children drawn from developmentalism, the strong presence of women carers are coupled with gendered assumptions of early childhood music education as 'women's work'. It then inevitably carries the lower status associated with caring and with feminised professions and the concomitant assumptions that the work is low skills, intuitive, amateur work that requires little or no formal training. Quite the opposite is, of course, the case. An early childhood music educator may be working with a mother and baby group in a community centre one day, working interactively in a nursery setting with 3-year-olds the next followed the day after by teaching music with a class of 5-year-olds in school. The pedagogical content knowledge and interactive social and musical skills required to work effectively in a variety of situations across this age range – characterised as it is by profound physical and intellectual changes – are considerable. At present, however, in the UK there is no requirement for recognised qualification to practise and no forms of regulation, although I should point out that this is not the case in all countries.

However because this sector of very young children and women workers is accorded less value and lower status, then it is easily overlooked and side-lined. Overlooking young children in music education debates is so embedded that it goes unnoticed and rarely arouses concern. Frequently young children are simply excluded from policy, resource allocation and funding distributions. Alternatively, their activity may be readily converted into something that *is* considered to hold value in our current education system. It is transformed into apparent benefits for other areas of learning, notably communication and language, social skills and self-regulation, or mythical benefits to brain development (Young, 2020b) and so on. Or, similarly, its value may be framed as laying the foundation for the start of 'proper' music education in later years and also contributing to school readiness, rather than a music education, here and now, in its own right and as a right for all young children. It is a continual struggle to bring early childhood to the attention of those in power who determine policy and hold purse strings while at the same time resisting the pull of these other demands.

Introducing the articles

Having outlined some general themes that characterise, beset and benefit the early childhood music education sector, let me now turn to the articles in this special issue. These articles introduce and discuss aspects of work in music education that frequently do not receive much attention. Firstly, the articles focus on the under-3 s. All too often the greatest interest in early childhood music is given to the couple of preschool years that butt up to schooling rather than the full age phase from birth upwards. There is a commonly held belief that early childhood music consists only of the preparatory year or two prior to formal schooling. Often I point out that the full 5/6 years of early childhood matches the number of years children spend in primary (elementary) schooling and the age phase in secondary schooling prior to specialisation. In England certainly, and in many other countries, for each of those three age phases of corresponding length, music is part of the national curriculum requirements for all children.

It is true, however, that the expansion of practice downwards in age to under-3 s is a relatively recent development. As I have explained (e.g. Young, 2018), there is a 'toddler gap' in research, both theoretical and practice-based, and that gap needs to be addressed; hence the attention given to that age phase in these articles. Through the articles, we visit daycare practice with babies and toddlers. We learn about the musical experiences, at home, of children in New Zealand at the ages of 9 months and 2 years through a large cohort study. We gain insights into the singing of an 18-month-old girl at home through detailed analysis. We visit a project that works with care-experienced children and their foster carers. We hear about a project that brought together mothers from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds to share remembered lullabies. Thus each article, in its own way, reveals musical experiences and music education practices that are rarely heard: home-based music, daycare practice, among minority ethnic mothers, with care-experienced children.

Each article adopts a quite different method and approach and views through a different lens. One article is a statistical analysis of a very large cohort study, over 6,000 children and this sits alongside a microanalysis of the singing by a single 18-month-old. Another article describes a creative arts project presented as an interview with the artist. Another is a case study that explores pedagogical process and another is an action research project, also focused on pedagogy, that aimed to change practice. Each methodological lens illuminates some aspects and occludes others and to read across this range of articles contributes to a fuller picture. The New Zealand study offers statistical analysis of large sample sizes to provide substance, a bedrock, that adds to the knowledge base of children's everyday musical experiences. Such a survey cannot, however, in contrast, convey the aesthetic, expressivity and meaningfulness of the lullaby project led by Roxana Vilk, a multi-media artist. Her project was initiated, interpreted and guided through her creative musicianship and personal experiences. These meaningful, sensitive qualities can

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be easily lost, in my view, in music education research and writing unless we make more room for artistry and personal voice as a medium of interpretation. Equally the microanalysis of one small excerpt of singing by one child captures the precise detail that large surveys are incapable of capturing. Alongside these articles, a team of early childhood academics from Canterbury Christ Church University and the Froebel Trust, expert in approaches to developing professional practice, encouraged thoughtful reflections from daycare workers to evolve responsive, caring musical practice. Finally, a case study of work with care-experiencing children and their foster mothers offers insights into a model of practice tailored to their needs through the interpretation of qualitative interviews.

Two articles focus on the detail of pedagogy. While the offer of private music sessions for babies and toddlers with their carers has expanded considerably in recent years, there has not been a corresponding level of attention given to the pedagogy of music work with under-3 s. The New Zealand survey provides firm evidence that this pedagogical work is urgently required. Evans, Dean and Byett found that although many of the mothers took their children to music groups, a significant proportion did not and the strongest predictor for attendance was European heritage. This suggests that early childhood music education has evolved in the image of a Westernised model of parenting that does not accommodate all parenting styles. I arrived at a similar conclusion, drawing on an analysis of Somali-born mothers now resident in Bristol, England who were unexpectedly provided with a music session at a stay-and-play but who did not join in (Young, 2017). It points to the need for practice developments that are more alert to the socio-cultural characteristics of participants. Humphrey's article explores what he frames as 'social pedagogy'; an approach which aims to be particularly responsive to the needs of participants. Likewise the action research project among daycare practitioners arrives at carefully worked out pedagogical recommendations that are flexible and adaptable to a range of situations. The Lullaby project in Bristol led by Roxana Vilk could also be framed as socially responsive, community-centred practice, perhaps not a pedagogy as such, but a community approach that can be emulated. Its success at engaging minority-ethnic mothers (more than forty turned up to the opening session when only a handful were expected) holds valuable learning. It is pertinent that all these accounts of work that genuinely engaged the carers and mothers included time to get to know them and to understand and be empathetic to their situations.

There is another key theme threading through all the articles. In combination, they tell us about the song and singing in the world of young children. There are songs for, with and by children taking place in varied contexts: at home, community music settings, arts venues, daycare and preschools. The song worlds of young children are nested within the musical worlds, domestic and professional, of those who care for them. As I have already mentioned, but will reiterate because it strikes me as important; this is women's music, the music of caring. The lullaby work of Roxana Vilk, the Sage Gateshead work with foster mothers and the Babysong project demonstrate that early childhood music work needs to be adult-centred, as well as child-centred, somehow blending both. In my view, one of the most important aspects to emerge from these projects, and certainly the one that impinges on my thinking, is that the musical dimension is meaningful to the mothers and carers. The construction of motherhood is sensitive, rich and respectful. These mothers and professional carers actively contributed to the song content, keeping true to their identity.

Inclusivity is high on the music education agenda at present; and rightly so. Not only do I make a broad case through this issue for inclusion on the basis of age, but inclusion on the basis of class, ethnic heritage and geographic location is present in the content of the articles and the authors who contribute. It's worth re-emphasising the cultural bias in the majority of research that has been carried out into infancy, early childhood and parenting practices and the continual need to address that bias. By far the majority of research has been carried out in North America, a high proportion in Europe and a very little in Australasia. And it must be stated that outside these affluent, industrialised nations in countries where the majority of the world's children live, there is a serious dearth of research. However, New Zealand represents Australasia through the large cohort study reported here. Incidentally, to my knowledge, this is the largest cohort study that has

been analysed for what it might reveal about the musical lives of young children. Similarly, the work of international scholars, educators and artists who are not first language English authors can be less well known than work that is routinely published in English. One aim I set myself for this issue was to ensure it included articles by authors for whom English is not their primary language. The dominance of the English language in scholarly literature is problematic. It is easy to become convinced that the only valuable work is taking place across the English-speaking countries and to become lazy about accessing work not written in English. Google translate may be clumsy, but it does a good enough job. But more seriously, the dominance of the English language limits whose voices are heard and where, and restricts the scope of our theories and concepts.

Inclusivity is an issue that academic publishing also needs to address. Academic gatekeeping can limit the authors who are heard and what can be said. Journals such as this one can be highly exclusionary not merely because of the dominance of the English language but also through the processes of review and adherence to formal academic conventions. Without doubt processes of review and editorship maintain standards of rigour, accuracy, elimination of bias, quality of writing and so on. But those processes can also be a barrier. In this issue, we hear from an early academic career author and authors for whom English is not the primary language and for whom an academic journal would not be their usual or familiar vehicle of communication.

Finally, I am grateful to the authors who have given considerable time and careful thought to writing these articles and for being patient with me as I worked with them on editing. I admire, respect and value their work. Thank you too to the reviewers for their time and comments. I hope that this focus issue represents a valuable contribution to the whole field of music education.

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