Meeting the goals of *Te Whāriki* through music in the early childhood curriculum

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The purpose of this article is to examine the strands and goals which arise from the four principles of 'Empowerment; Holistic Development; Family and Community and Relationships' (Te Whāriki,1996) and to propose how music can be used in an integral way not only to meet the stated goals but also to promote them to their fullest potential. It also presents a challenge to early childhood educators to consider making greater intentional use of music appropriately and relevantly throughout their programs and their day-to-day activities. There is often the tendency to limit music to mat time or to sporadic rhythmic clapping or singing throughout the day without a conscious understanding of how these activities link to the strands and the goals of Te Whāriki.

Introduction

From the very first gathering of human beings in groups, life has been celebrated, nurtured and revived through artistic expression. Throughout all ages dance, music, art, drama and a range of integrated art forms have provided the platform for the transmission of cultural and societal conventions. Through the exploration and study of these art forms we have been able to reconstruct and capture long-forgotten oral traditions and provide opportunities today for such traditions to be maintained.

In spite of the significant contribution the art forms offer cultures and society, the arts are frequently misunderstood, mis-communicated, or even undervalued. The current international trend for educational policies of countries to place more emphasis on the development of creativity, partly in acknowledgement that creativity is essential to economic competitiveness

(Design Council, 2000; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Arts Council of England, 2000; Selzer & Bentley, 1999), necessitates a time for reflection on the bicultural national curriculum statement for the early childhood sector currently being advocated in New Zealand's Te Whāriki (1996).

The five strands detailed in Te Whāriki (1996) provide numerous opportunities for music to be an integral part of achieving the goals and requirements of Te Whāriki. Carr (1998), cited by Wright (2003, p.74), denotes that an authentic curriculum in the early childhood context gives attention to:

- the empowerment of children as active agents in their own learning
- the inclusion of the child's worlds (family and community)
- a holistic approach to children's growth and development
- recognition of the role of relationships in children's early learning.

The recognition of children as musically competent in particular cultures provides a basis for empowering them to become active agents of their own musical learning (Wright, 2003). Children come to the early childhood setting with an inherited repertoire of songs, rhymes and games learned or mimicked from family, friends and siblings. They are naturally drawn to the act of making music, a process of participation in musical performance—singing, playing, dancing and listening (Small, 1998). Children also bring meaningful musical experiences from their diverse environments. The work of Green (2005, p. 84) presents the dialectical relationship between musical meaning and experience. The representation is interpreted as inherent musical meaning responding in a positive or negative reaction/experience. Inherent musical meaning relates to the accepted music conventions utilised in musical discourse analysis. In inherent musical meaning a positive response would result in a celebration leading to an understanding or excitement for further enquiry. If inherent musical meaning is perceived as negative or unvalued, the

result is ambiguity or alienation—detachment, divorce, not wanting to participate. Ambiguity results in a misunderstood environment. The children's musical repertoire and vocabulary not only reflects their inherent musical experiences and meanings but also reflects their experience as music makers. This rich experiential and meaningful musical basis provides a solid foundation from which educators as facilitators of learning can begin to unlock the child's learning potential.

A holistic view of music for growth and development emphasises the links between music and other types of experience (Campbell, 1998), and recognises the role music plays in children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development (Klopper, 2002). In the early childhood setting, provision should be made for children to explore the dialectic relationship between inherent musical meaning and musical experience, and educators should see these and similar encounters as forms of literacy.

A multiple literacies approach to curriculum requires the acknowledgement of all of society's major forms of discourse, including music (Russell-Bowie, 2006). Children should be provided with opportunities to use the arts to depict and interpret, involving sensory, tactile, aesthetic, expressive and imaginative forms of understanding. Children learn artistic discourse through learning how to 'read' and 'write' using artistic symbols and by using visual, spatial, aural and bodily-kinaesthetic modes of thinking. This connection between body, thought, imagery, emotion, action and representation is, according to Wright (2003, p. 15), 'what makes the arts a highly important component of young children's education'. The development of children's musical literacy, and their competence to participate, should be of leading importance to educators of early childhood.

Van der Linde (1999, pp. 2-5) outlines six reasons the importance of music and movement activities should not be underestimated. Among these are four of particular relevance in meeting the goals of Te Whāriki through music in the early childhood curriculum:

- Mental capacity and intellect: There is a connection between music and the development of mathematical thinking. Music can lay the

foundation for Piaget's logico-mathematical reasoning since it provides ample opportunity for sequential and ordinal thinking (Piaget, 1950).

- Mastery of the physical self: Children develop coordination that aids muscular development. They begin to understand what they can do with their bodies as they run, balance, stretch, crawl and skip.
- Development of the affective aspect: Through music and movement children learn acceptable outlets to express feelings and relieve tension. Music may also convey a specific mood through which children reveal their feelings and emotions.
- Development of creativity: Music can create an imaginary world that stimulates a child's creativity. A box can become a drum, a stick can be transformed into a horn, or a broom could become a dance partner. Children make up songs or give new words to old songs for pure enjoyment or to convey a message.

Te Whāriki

The following structure is obtained directly from Te Whāriki (1996). The five strands are identified and then proposals are made for the achievement of each strand through the use of music. The use of italics indicates direct quotation from Te Whāriki (1996).

Strand 1: Wellbeing – Mana Atua

The health and wellbeing of the child are protected and nurtured.

Goals

Children experience an environment where:

- *Their health is promoted*

Even in a very informal way, laying the foundations for good singing will include introducing children to correct breathing and posture. Simple posture and breathing exercises, games which include balance and moving in time to

music and without music, will promote the coordination of breathing, singing, relaxation and focusing techniques.

Simple songs and chants can also be used to promote acquisition of specific academic and life skills such as good nutrition, information about food groups, personal hygiene and healthy habits.

- *Their emotional well-being is nurtured*

Since music can be used to release and express a range of emotions and feelings, music activities can be used successfully to promote emotional wellbeing. Group music-making activities using percussion instruments, and group movement and dancing to music, can also do much to encourage the shy child to be become more confident and outgoing as well as allowing the confident child to express feelings in a positive and nurturing environment.

Performing for each other as well as for parents and the school community can provide stimulation and feelings of wellbeing. Music is fun and allows many possibilities for free expression individually and in a group, both of which encourage self-confidence. Dancing/moving, singing and playing musical instruments—especially in time to joyous music—lifts the spirits and promotes feelings of wellbeing. The inter-dependence and individual responsibility to a group endeavour also produces feelings of belonging, being needed and inclusiveness in a happy, non-threatening event (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Competitiveness, striving for musical accuracy or perfection beyond the children's capabilities and allowing the activity to become stressful will undermine this endeavour at the youngest ages. It may be gradually encouraged as the child grows older.

- *They are kept from harm*

Becoming sound-sensitive will protect the young child from hearing impairments. It is not only important to control noise levels in the centre and to take every precaution to improve the overall acoustic level of the environment, but also equally important to deliberately draw children's attention to noise levels. A number of contemporary studies concerning noise in early childhood educational settings have established its detrimental effects on both children

and educators (Maxwell & Evans, 1999; Nelson & Soli 2000;Sorkin 2000). Most of these projects have focused on children, as they are more vulnerable than adults to long-term health, psychological, and educational impairments created by classroom noise (Evans & Lepore, 1993; Evans & Maxwell, 1997; Nelson & Soli, 2000).

Games and other imaginative and creative ways of suddenly encouraging children to be very still and very quiet (other than using disciplinary measures) teach children to celebrate silence and to become familiar with it so that they do not grow up 'fearing' or abhorring silence. The fact that exposure to excessively high noise levels over prolonged periods can be detrimental to hearing should also encourage greater control of the sonic environment. Since so many vital foundations are being laid at this stage, it also needs to be remembered that there can be a high correlation between prolonged exposure to high levels of sound and aggressive behaviour. Tension, tiredness, short-temperedness and lethargy are also common side-effects and outcomes resulting from careless attitudes towards exposure to sound. Learning to control one's environment is a life skill, and healthy habits begin at a young age.

One of the most serious outcomes of exposure to loud noises is a lack of sensitivity to and a 'shutting out' of sound which the body can do by way of a natural protective mechanism. This can lead to the child failing to develop good listening skills, which will impede their learning. Further, lack of sensitivity to specific sounds may result in the child missing critical safety warnings and verbal cues.

Becoming sound-sensitive and developing an awareness of necessary or unnecessary sounds, both desirable or undesirable, and learning to discriminate between different and similar sounds, lays the foundation for good listening skills that are essential for effective learning. Mills (1996, p. 86) discusses the notion of 'purposeful listening'—that is listening for specific features within the music. Campbell and Scott-Kassner (1995, p.159) refer to 'active listening' in contrast to 'functional listening', and illuminate interpretation as a form of listening that focuses on musical events in some

ways. There are many entertaining ways to introduce children at an early stage to the fact that sound not only enters their bodies through their ears, but that their bodies have to deal with sounds, intentionally or unintentionally absorbed, much as they have to deal with food. The analogy with food is useful as it assists children in developing an appreciation and understanding of the purpose and use of food simultaneously as they learn to understand and respect sound/music.

Many children are eventually incorrectly 'labelled' as having learning difficulties when in fact they are unable to concentrate, focus their minds and retain information because of poor listening skills. Poor listening skills can cause inattentiveness, restlessness, being easily distracted and other behavioural issues. A poor sonic environment can compound the problem. There needs to be greater care to ensure that children are surrounded by sounds which intentionally stimulate their focused listening skills while they are simultaneously protected from unnecessary sounds which simply distract them.

Wright (2003, p. 82) proffers a useful framework for thinking about the organisation of listening experiences in the early childhood setting:

- focus on *formal* properties
- focus on *representational* properties
- focus on *expressive* properties
- focus on *contextual* properties
- focus on *technical* properties.

Focusing on each of these aspects separately and in combination can ensure that a comprehensive listening program is developed.

Listening to music is fundamental to all forms of music-making and musical experience. To hear music is relatively easy, provided no physical barriers exist. However, to listen to music with understanding and comprehension requires repeated exposure and guided learning. The ability to listen with

understanding and comprehension will enhance all learning activities and should therefore become an integral part of early childhood learning centres. Developing this ability at such a young age will have long-term beneficial results for a life-long learning program.

Children need to learn to protect and nurture their health and wellbeing by actively engaging in musical activities. The activities should promote good health, stimulate emotional wellbeing and develop sonic safe practises.

Strand 2:

Belonging – Mana Whenua

Goals

Children and their families feel a sense of belonging. Children and their families experience an environment where:

- *Connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended*

Young children thrive in environments where they interact with adults. This is particularly true when the adults are attentive to the interests and expressions of the children. Positioning teachers so that episodes of 'joint attention' (pointing to objects, showing, following another person's gaze, responding to invitations to social interaction) (Smith, 1999) are possible is important for a child's growth and wellbeing. This includes emotional wellbeing and the successful acquisition of language. Smith (1999, p. 94) researched joint attention episodes in New Zealand early childhood centres and found that 35 per cent of the children in the study did not experience any joint attention episodes with caregivers. This should provide suitable motivation for the provision of musical experiences where children and their families can be honoured through cultural exchange in which families are invited to share recordings of music from their specific culture; invited to perform songs and dances from their cultures; and encouraged to teach these songs and dances to the children to enable cultural transference.

- *They know that they have a place*

Group activities such as dancing and singing within a cultural context promote a sense of belonging. Sharing how families celebrate special events allows children to feel they have a special place to belong. Should this not really be the case in their own lives, non-specific cultural experiences or simply making music together or singing or dancing will have the effect of encouraging the child to feel a sense of belonging however temporarily.

MacNaughton and Williams (2004, p.187) cite the following support for children to enjoy songs from a diverse range of cultures, suggesting that children can:

- learn about similarities and differences within and between different cultural groups (Spodek & Saracho, 1994)
- discover cultural diversity. Children often enjoy the folk songs and the work songs of different cultures because of their repetitive lyrics and strong rhythms (Ramsey, 1987)
- share their own cultural heritage with others (Clarke, 1992). Children can help to teach songs from their own culture to other children in the group
- learn a second language. Songs can also help children to learn English as a second language. Simple songs can help them to participate on ... an equal footing in the group with native speakers … (Van Oosten, 1996, p. 3).

    - *They feel comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events*

Many musical activities require children to wait their turn, listen to each other, hold their instrument still until they have to play, and respond to changes in the music (play loudly or softly when required). Children learn mutual respect and ‘rules’ of participation, honouring each other and being tolerant, unselfish and understanding. All this can be encouraged by means of active involvement in music making and by watching musical performances. For example, children can watch an orchestra perform and have their attention

drawn to how the instruments are conventionally held and played, each instrument having its own special time to play and to rest. They can watch cultural dances and observe various conventions, such as what dancers do with their hands or which cultural groups join hands and which do not.

- *They know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour*

Much of what has already been suggested will encourage this basic understanding of boundaries and acceptable behaviour. The discipline required when practising a dance or song or a piece of percussion music to achieve an 'acceptable' level of performance encourages perseverance, persistence and acceptable behaviour within musical boundaries. We all sing on the same note; we all play together in time to the music; we all wait till the 'conductor' indicates the start and finish. Music is a highly social form of human practice. Musical works are multi-dimensional artistic-social constructions. These constructs are learned through constructive knowledge and optimal experience of musical works (Elliot, 1995). The opportunity to practise these constructs and to gain meaning helps children to learn to become:

> *… a participant in community dialogue, toward the 'acquisition of shared meaning' through the use of gestures and sounds (Nelson, 1985, cited in Hass Dyson & Genishi, 1993, p. 124).*

Strand 3:

Contribution – Mana Tangata

Goals

Opportunities for learning are equitable and each child's contribution is valued.

Children experience an environment where:

- *There are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background.*

Group activities in the arts transcend any other group experience for diversity of age and gender. They are more inclusive and there is greater mutual responsibility and need to work together for the good of the whole group performance. Such pedagogical practices can be identified as collaborative learning, which has shown to be a more effective way of learning than individualised or competitive learning (Slavin, 1983; Johnson & Johnson, 1987). There is a robust research tradition addressing a myriad of issues involving collaborative learning (Victoria, 2005). Johnson, Johnson and Stanne (2000) have suggested that there is no other pedagogical practice that simultaneously generates such diverse positive outcomes as collaborative learning. Everyone performs simultaneously, which is like a team game or sport. A team sport is an 'orchestrated' endeavour where everyone has a role to play so that the team as a whole reaches the goal. Working towards something outside of themselves teaches children true unselfishness and consideration.

When describing people's cultural and ethnic milieu, it is important for adults to provide children with accurate terms to describe themselves and others. The use of non-biased language to describe social diversity to young children is an important aspect of implementing an anti-biased approach to teaching and learning. Since music is universally regarded as a custodian of cultural conventions, it is a highly suitable vehicle by which differing cultural and ethnic milieus can be explored and experienced.

- *They are affirmed as individuals*

Group work requires total commitment from each individual. Young children, like all people, need affirmation and a sense of belonging. Affirmation can be attained through the individual's contribution to the group, and this establishes self-worth.

- *They are encouraged to learn with and alongside others*

The inter-dependence and the responsibilities inherent in group music-making and dance provide invaluable opportunities for working alongside others. Familiar, interested adults from the community are particularly important for

scaffolding children's learning in collaborative group situations, as they can create a comfortable and supportive learning environment through experimental play and investigation (Centres for Curiosity and Imagination, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Weier, 2000). According to Yenawine (2003. p. 12) people can overcome their own fears and limitations by sharing observations and insights with others:

> *A group of people brings a breadth of information and experience to the process, even if it is not experience with art. Importantly, the synergy of people adding to each other's observations and bouncing ideas off one another enables a "group mind" to find possible meanings in unfamiliar images more productively than any individual alone could do.*

Strand 4:

Communication – Mana Reo

Goals

- *The language and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected*

The arts historically are considered to be the custodians of the language and symbols of culture. Oral tradition utilises poems, songs and dance as a strong means of preserving culture and tradition. We know oral transmissions to be very effective. Along with the discipline of precise transmission, an oral system of education can encourage creativity through the development of forms of innovation and problem-solving (Mans, 2002).

Goals

Children experience an environment where:

- *They develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes*

In music sessions children learn to communicate using their voices in ways other than formal speech or vocalisation. They learn to use their bodies to

express emotions, ideas and role play situations and events. Musical instruments provide opportunities for non-verbal communication such as:

- accompanying songs and recorded music
- creating original thematic pieces of music
- demonstrating and expressing understanding of musical concepts
- experimenting with various ways of playing instruments to achieve various effects
- applying their knowledge of musical concepts to their own creative expression
- developing coordination
- developing and enhancing reading skills.

- *They develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes*

Singing has been proved to assist children with speech difficulties, pronunciation and projection. Singing increases confidence in pronouncing words and acquiring new vocabulary, and provides non-threatening opportunities to openly express ideas, feelings and emotions. The correct breathing taught to produce good singing voices can help to remedy stuttering and other speech defects. Social customs and norms such as ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ can be taught through rhymes and chants. Listening to children’s comments and questions as they discuss their music activities is an important strategy in building children’s interest and sense of wonder in the world around them (Mc Williams, 1999; Fleer & Cahill, 2001).

- *They experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures*

Stories and symbols of their own and other cultures are all aptly captured in songs and dances. Organising a *Ra Whakangahau* and involving the whole *Whanau* allows for a meaningful bi-cultural experience. Maori and Pacific Island performing arts can be experienced in a way in which even young

children can meaningfully participate. The movements of the *Kapahaka* as well as the making and the twirling of the *Poi*, would allow children to discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive. No *Ra Whakangahau* would be complete without arts and crafts and the weaving of flax, for example, to produce *kete*. Even the *Mahi Kai* the preparing of food, can involve children and teach them the stories and symbols of their culture. Alongside these specific Maori examples, children from other cultures can also make contributions which would highlight the similarities and differences between Maori and Pacific Island cultures and other New Zealand cultures.

Making up stories related to culture can include Easter stories related to Easter eggs. For example, imaginative ideas about the role of the Easter Bunny within a secular context can be explored. Likewise, exploring ideas about the 'new life' symbolised with the egg can be explored within a spiritual context. *Matariki*, the Maori New Year, which occurs in June, can involve the children in the traditional practice of planting vegetables and trees as well as encouraging them to set goals for the New Year. Such cultural activities would always include experiences and stories passed down from generation to generation.

Music has been called the 'universal language of mankind'. 'Depending on the culture of their family and community, children will perpetuate and create their songs based upon familiar sounds' (Campbell, 2007, p. 883). A number of theories have been derived from the scholarly study of children's song and musical play across the disciplines. Minks (2002) classified them as reflecting paradigms that are: (a) diffusionist, where song is seen to represent a culture trait that can be traced to various geographic regions; (b) enculturative, in which children's music is seen as part of adult culture; (c) autonomous, such that children's music transcends locality and cultural background; (d) pertinent to cultural cognitivism, where song is viewed for its understanding of children's learning processes and communicative patterns; and (e) illustrative of music/language acquisition, the realm of study that focuses on the incipient vocalised speech and musical utterances of infants and young children. Campbell (2007) claims that collections of singing games and song texts

assert children's poetic sensibilities, their playful interactions and social networks, and their links to their community.

Strand 5:

Exploration – Mana Aoturoa

Goals

The child learns through active exploration of the environment.

Children experience an environment where:

- *Their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised*

Music can release inhibitions amongst the shy and provide an outlet for the excessively active and extrovert child, in such a way as to be spontaneous and informal while providing opportunities for intentional learning.

- *They gain confidence in and control of their bodies;*

Playing instruments promotes coordination and control of the body, as does dancing. Body movements are regulated in time to the pulse and rhythm of the music and to the melodic contour, tempo and dynamic variations. Singing too provides an opportunity for regulating breathing and controlling posture and stance. This helps develop self-expression and provides an avenue for the release of emotions. Discovering the body's capability for movement heightens a child's self-confidence and physical coordination, and develops connections between cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills.

- *They learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning*

Sounds are exciting and can provide a stimulus for exploration. Children should be encouraged to make simple instruments from a range of sound-producing objects. As they use their instruments to explore musical concepts, particularly timbre, children can try to relate the sounds of their instruments to those of pre-recorded sounds of traditional and commercial instruments,

which encourages comparisons and associations of musical elements. Activities could include children deciding whether or not their instrument has a higher or lower pitch than that of another child's in their group, or that of a traditional or commercially-produced Western instrument demonstrated by the teacher or played from a recording. Many creative ideas can be explored following a question such as, 'What does the sound of this make you think of or remind you of?'

Identifying environmental sounds (seeds, wood, stones and dry leaves) as well as household sounds (doorbell, alarm clock, telephone and snoring) can prompt rational decision-making. Choices and decisions can be made to select appropriate sounds to support stories.

A game of voice recognition while blindfolded would assist in the development of sound-and-name association and lay the foundation of auditory discrimination. Children can experiment with all the different vocal sounds they can produce. Similarly, they can be encouraged to use their bodies to create a range of sounds.

A selection of homemade and commercially-produced instruments can be used to help children discover how different sounds can be produced and how to group similar sounds according to pitch, timbre and so on. Traditional Maori instruments may not be readily available, but pictures and recordings will assist the children in exploring music within an appropriate cultural context.

Melodic recognition through humming a familiar tune, playing a tune on a melodic instrument, or listening to recorded music offers the opportunity for young children to recognise familiar tunes. Their mental faculties are stimulated as they recognise repeated passages, sequences and patterns in the music.

- *They develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds*

The exploration of sounds provides a direct connection with the natural, physical and material environment. It is important that a very strong foundation is laid for children to learn to be 'sound aware' in order to

appreciate the potential for sound and its negative and positive effects. Allowing children to associate music with emotions from an early age can teach them that excessively loud sounds can not only damage their hearing but also make them feel restless, possibly aggressive, and even scared. Likewise, encouraging children to select music for calm activities such as painting or for rest periods will teach them to consider the appropriate use of music.

Children can be encouraged to recognise sounds in nature, such as bird and animal calls, the wind and the rain. Careful listening can help children to re-create such sounds as closely as possible – using their voices, bodies and sound-producing objects.

Learning about sounds in nature will enable children to be sensitive to these sounds and to react appropriately to them. Similarly, exposing young children to the sounds that surround them daily helps them to recognise the meaning or message in the sound. This process can start with the familiar sound of the school bell or the teacher's voice, and then move to more distant yet important sounds such as the police car siren or smoke alarm. Sensitising children to the sounds in their environment will ensure the early development of good listeners and not just a community that hears.

Music plays an integral part of any society's structure, and as such allows children an avenue for understanding social norms and practices in a non-threatening and fun manner

Conclusion

The many benefits music holds for development of young children—intellectually, physically and emotionally—can not be underestimated. Integrating music meaningfully, not only to meet the stated goals of Te Whāriki but also to promote them to their fullest potential is indeed a worthwhile aim. It is also a challenge to early childhood educators to be more determined to make greater use of music, appropriately and relevantly throughout their programs and their day-to-day activities in their teaching centres.

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