



Dr Susan Young,
University of Exeter

A key idea

In education today - there are two strong contradictory movements - one of complexity and diversity increase, and one of complexity and diversity reduction. The more we seem to come to understand the complexity of the arts and learning, the more there seem to be attempts to impose strategies, policies, curricula, goals, simple theoretical ideas that reduce the complexities and diversities.



Who am I?

- Royal College of Music: pianist
- Postgraduate teaching qualification
- Teacher in general schools and a music specialist school across 4-18 age range
- PhD - spontaneous music-making of 3-4 year olds
- University lecturing and research: music education, childhood studies, research methods
- Freelance research and consultancy - half at/for the university, half with arts and education organisations

What I do now

3 types of research:

1 University: theory driven

2 Freelance: applied, pragmatic

3 'Third way': theory/applied blend

Borders, boundaries, between

- As an academic/educator/artist working inside and outside of institutional boundaries - creating new networks, entrepreneurially - 'border crossing'
- Working between the academic, practice and policy fields - trying to create connections, 'border crossing?'

‘new researcher’: ‘new artist’

- Personal skills - in particular theories-methods/art form, etc. [and increasingly with digital technologies]
- Curious, creative, bringing certain key skills but able to apply them flexibly, always learning new things
- Interpersonal skills - ‘networked’ with many different collaborations, able to ‘change languages’
- Intercultural + intergenerational competences
- Values/ethics-led and independent thinking - but must work within the ‘real world’ [+ need to earn a living!]
- Portfolio career - projects

My research

Research integrated in to practice, 'real life' (practice) integrated in to research - trying to work at the borders of change by questioning the assumed limits of traditional practices, creating new forms of artistic understanding and shaping new ways of learning and teaching. Such activities are a form of research - conducted within and for the arts and children (usually in education) rather than simply 'about' arts or education. They are useful and applied rather than abstract -

Research types 1 and 2

- 1 University research - usually small funding, I decide focus - aiming to be 'cutting edge' in my field (and hopefully relevant to practice) - but have to meet criteria set (nationally) for originality, quality and imposed by the (market driven) university
- 2 Freelance research - applied research for arts/education organisations - 'commercial' funding, I don't decide the focus, methods must fit the practice/project - to meet criteria set by the organisation.

Arts/education organisations

- Orchestras, theatre companies, art galleries
- Association of British Orchestras
- Arts Council England
- Creative Partnerships
- CAPE (Creative Arts Partnerships in Education) UK
- Education authorities and organisations
- Arts promoters

A third 'in between' way -

Collaborative research: with arts or educational organisations to design projects from the start - to suggest innovations informed by research/theory and responsive to social/educational/arts-cultural changes and needs - to build the research dimension in to the structure of the practical project, to identify funding sources

as a new kind of 'in-between-place' - responding to the professional field, using research as part of development and therefore work within policy frameworks but at the same time try to lead new strategic directions

Type 1: Current projects

- MyPlace:MyMusic - a study of children's everyday musical activities in diverse locations
- Karaoke Kids - a study of 7 - 11 year olds singing with karaoke at home
- New! MIROR project - EU funded, to develop an interactive software in early years music education practice

Research in the first way

- Driven by theoretical innovations
- I(we) are aiming to push boundaries of understanding

BUT

- Constrained by national research assessment exercise (RAE) for universities in the UK
- Usually poorly funded (new EU project is exception), so always small-scale
- Can remain isolated from practice - how to integrate new understandings in to practice? - and policy

Theoretical directions

Until recently, child development was accepted as the perspective through which children were understood and socialization the primary way in which sociologists thought about children. Childhood is increasingly understood as socially constructed and children as actors in their own social worlds rather than simply as incomplete persons who are in the process of becoming adults. Research using this perspective explores social constructions of childhood held by adults and embodied in institutions through time and across places, and how biology, gender, social class, race and social location affect the everyday lives of children in families, schools, and other social contexts.

Complexity



Social studies of childhood - contests dominant discourses, those paradigmatic perspectives and theories of learning that act as if they were self-evident and there are no alternatives. For example - child development - and their assumptions of an 'essential' child. Such discourses contribute to strategies of complexity reduction. We need to not only contest but offer alternatives, that the dominant discourses far from being self-evident are just one from a range of choices.

Contesting dominant discourses and offering alternatives

- Influence of critical theories (e.g. poststructuralist theories - critical pedagogy, race theory, contemporary feminism) and new theorising around social, cultural and technological changes (e.g. cultural historical theory, sociology of technology)
- I would suggest that arts and creative world is not engaging with these influences and changes enough - certainly not in music education with younger children

New areas for research

- In the social studies of childhood - the 'everyday' becomes much more significant - home, bedroom and family spaces, outdoor play areas, virtual play areas, peer relationships, clubs and community/cultural centre activities
- Educational theories can tend to assume school is at the centre and then looking outwards to home, community etc. [one-way view]

Type 1: Study of children's singing with karaoke at home

- 'research conversations' with pairs of children in a school
- Children who sing with karaoke identified (18 out of 45 children)
- 3 pairs of sisters
- Visits to home negotiated by head teacher of school



Home Visits

- ‘show and tell’ karaoke
- Interview with parent (mother in each case)

My need to learn about karaoke and media items

Karaoke falls through theoretical gaps

- Folklore studies - interested in children's cultures - as artefacts (the games, the songs and analysing these)
- Psychology - how children develop as singers
- Pop culture studies - youth/young adult mainly
- Ethnomusicology - music in everyday life in 'other' cultures
- Music technology - technology as equipment to support existing pedagogical practices, often 'neutralised' from its media/popular culture content

Some new directions -

- Ethnomusicology starting to explore children's everyday music in 'developed' world countries [Bickford]
- Folklore studies starting to be interested in popular and media cultures [Marsh]
- Children's everyday culture - part of social studies of childhood [Reid-Walsh]
- Sociology of technology - but in music, still mostly with 'youth'

The changing nature of children's music and musical practices [arts and artistic practices] in an increasingly technologically-mediated world within which karaoke is just one manifestation. The karaoke as technological resource is bound to particular forms of evolving domestic, family-based musical practices for young children so that technology and musical process cannot be separated: the technology and its musical practices are one and the same.

MyPlace: MyMusic

- Anna Rita Addressi & Francesca Minigher, : University of Bologna, Italy
- Elizabeth Andango: Kenyatta University, Kenya
- Claudia Gluschankof: Lewinsky College, Israel
- Sven-Erik Holgersen: University of Copenhagen
- Beatriz Ilari: Federal University of Parana, Curitiba, Brazil
- Theano Koutsoupidou: University of the Aegean, Greece
- Jennifer Leu: National Kaohsiung Normal **University, Taiwan.**
- Chee Hoo Lum: Nanyang University, Singapore
- Jessica Perez: University of Barcelona, Spain
- Diane Persillin: University of Texas, USA
- Jose Retra: University of Exeter and Netherlands

MyPlace: MyMusic

- Study of 7 year olds' everyday home-based music in diverse (international) locations
- Home visit - 'show and tell', photos, video clips, interview with parent
- Data being uploaded on to wiki
- Not cross-cultural - juxtaposing several examples helps to emphasise similarities rather than difference

The wiki -

The importance of collaborative research for the 'new researcher' - intercultural, inter-professional, interdisciplinary, non-hierarchical - dialogue as a generative source of new ideas

Emerging interpretations

Contexts/arenas of musical activity for children and how they interact, intersect, blend

- Social/cultural images of young children as musical (gendered, racialised)
- Media-corporate - 'popular culture', (marketing, 'for profit')
- Family interactions - 'family' music (flexible notions of 'family'?)
- Peer interactions - children's culture (pressures to belong?)
- School context - 'school' music (pedagogises music)
- Community places - church, clubs - and cultural centres, museums, libraries (heritage? - if so, whose heritage?)

And the changing possibilities enabled by digital technologies within those different spaces or places for music (arts activity)

Musical (cultural, arts) childhoods

Arriving at complex notions of musical childhoods which embrace children's experience across all domains - reflect the diversity, the importance of everyday non-school activities (at home, in bedrooms, with friends, in play spaces) and how they intersect with educational activity and with cultural and arts centre activity (third places for learning)



Implications for education

- ‘School’ music (or other arts) is only one small part of all these different dimensions of musical childhoods
- Education often ignores what else children do
- Evolving understandings of ‘arts’ childhoods that embrace all these different contexts and ‘framings’
- Not seeing any dimension as somehow in opposition to others [e.g. school versus home activity], but education having a role to identify gaps and what is problematic (e.g. media literacy) in relation to children’s own musical [arts] futures

Type 2: Current projects

- National project for orchestral musicians to work in early childhood centres
- A project to develop family participation in arts and cultural activities

Research in the second way

- Driven by arts policy directions - strategic [In the UK - 'using' the arts to remedy social inequalities]
- Accountability - arts organisations often attempting to justify work by demonstrating evidence of wider social impact
- Research often framed by current emphasis on 'evidence' to 'prove'
- Integrated in to practice, but initiatives are usually 'top down'

AND

- Not aiming to push boundaries of understanding - often bound by politics and/or self-promotion (profit) for arts organisations involved
- Often commissioners do not want to hear uncomfortable critical thinking - only 'good news' stories
- Often raises personal dilemmas for me around power and advantage - who is it really serving? ['new' researcher and values-led, independence]

Type 3: 'in-between'

- Project to develop Theatre with under 3's [with a theatre company]
- A project to develop culturally sensitive approaches to creative arts in children's centres serving majority Muslim communities [with an independent EY education charity]

An example of 'third way'

- Developing theatre with under 3's (North Edinburgh Arts Centre, Scotland - Starcatchers project)
- Researchers and creative team working hand-in-hand - dynamic interplay
- Creative team tried out small theatre sketches in nursery close to arts centre - 'seed' ideas
- Video recorded, analysed by research team adopting methods and theoretical perspective from Trevarthen of adult/infant interaction
- Analysis and practice led to theory of 'interactive and absorbed engagement'
- Theory enacted in theatre piece as 'interactive installation with performance elements'
- Linked back again with contemporary theories of participatory arts, interactive installations

How is the understanding conveyed?

- The theatre performance? - creative output of the team
- The theory written up in the report, in articles?
- Changes in the way the creative team will work?
- Changes in the way that the children's theatre director now conceives of and plans work?

SOMETHING OF ALL OF THOSE FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES,
DIFFERENT PEOPLE - research can contribute to making
arts/creative/professional judgments more 'intelligent'

Research in the third way

Can be a difficult balance - power struggles, trying to hold on to intellectual/creative independence, the dominance of certain forms of knowledge (e.g. rational/scientific 'knowing' still taken as gold standard or policy makers/managers who want simple information and simple answers) and downgrading of others - creative knowing, qualitative research etc.

Ethics, values and issues of social justice also create dilemmas - who is this for ultimately, who benefits?

Identities and discourses

- Academic, artist, policy maker, manager/promotor - identities are complex
- Each has their own discourse (not all are verbal), priorities - negotiating those
- Researcher - trying to make room for multiple perspectives while retaining a critical role in generating questions and exposing hidden assumptions
- The need for reflexivity - 'real worldness', focus on active, engaged approaches (action research and formative) while trying to hold on to research rigour
- Collaboration across boundaries can be challenging but dialogue is creative and generates new thinking

Time to Play

Developing intercultural approaches for creative play in 4 children's centres serving majority Muslim communities.

Exploring and finding new approaches to practice

- Questionnaire survey of mothers [carried out by mothers]
- Artists documented their practice as diaries, photos etc.
- Reflective seminars at regular intervals
- Critical race theory to inform seminars and how work developed
- Recommendations for practice that evolved

Some emerging conclusions

- Educational practice usually places the child at the centre [and takes cultural, social, political context for granted]
- Time to Play found it had to start with the big, social and political issues at centre and with family at the centre
- Artists felt de-skilled when faced with new challenges and personally uncomfortable around issues of race and religious difference - afraid of offending - needed time for reflection
- Time to talk first with families - to share experiences
- Key respected people - as go-betweens
- Some specific restrictions among most devout around music and dance - but majority very liberal

A methodological menu

- **Research as practical and applied problem solving in real world situations**
- **Research as bricolage** – a repertoire of methods to use as appropriate
- **Collaborative research** – dialogue with academics, artists and arts organisations beyond the university
- **Reflexivity** (Bourdieu) — research is itself a form of creative practice with its own internal logics - and ethics –
- **Building new understandings of children’s activity** – video analysis, observation field notes, photos, research conversations [children as subjects not objects]
- **Action research + Reflective practice** - within projects, responsive to what is happening, formative
- **Participatory methods** – documenting, gathering information, of an event; research with children and adults not ‘on’ them
- **Applied, critical theory** – mobilising theory to illuminate, analyse, understand and challenge practice

- - - - and always trying to think
outside the box - - -

Susan.Young@exeter.ac.uk