

Part 2, Case Study 2

In this case study, I look back on my experiences as a newly hired music teacher given the task of bringing greater diversity to a school's existing music program and I reflect on the choices I made and the factors that guided or influenced the program renewal that I was embarking on. As a narrative inquirer, I seek to understand the decisions I made in light of several theoretical contexts, in particular, connections to the theories and research of Maxine Greene, Paulo Freire and Homi Bhabha. The telling of this story is intended to be a "mode of knowing" (Bruner, 1986, p. 11) and through the process of retelling, I seek to find connections between the events in the narrative, how they have come to shape my identity as an educator and ultimately, how this retelling might inform others seeking paths of renewal and transformation within their spaces of learning.

A Question of Renewal

The arts give expression to important aspects of our lives. They enable the aesthetic representation of lives. Through their forms and processes the arts enable artists and non-artists to re-view, re-interpret or bear witness to aspects of lives, stories and experiences (Hatton, 2007, p. 176).

As the newly hired music teacher, I was charged with the task of bringing renewed energy to the school's music program. The school, a smaller setting, consisting of 250-300 students from Kindergarten–Grade 9 was a unique

configuration of an Elementary/Junior High school within the city's Board of Education:

- School Mission: Educating tomorrow's citizens today within a safe learning community by providing a challenging and engaging environment that fosters uniqueness and embraces diversity.
- School Motto: Small School—Big Results
- Unique Points: Inquiry Based Learning; Integration of technology into learning; Strong sense of community from K-9; Activities: Cross Grade Activities, Buddy Program; High Standards of Achievement; Focus on Early Literacy

During the interview the Principal had stressed that the previous music program was primarily, if not entirely, choral-based and that she was seeking an individual who could bring greater diversity to the music offerings in the school. There were no resources available other than a set of choral risers, a filing cabinet full of choral arrangements and a random assortment of rhythm sticks and older, well-worn, damaged percussion instruments. I inquired about the opportunity to get some Orff instruments (xylophones, metallophones, etc.) and some additional colour percussion instruments (assorted drums, bell tree, maracas etc.) and was told that I had \$500 to spend. Realizing that this funding would not purchase enough instruments for an entire class, I immediately set out on a quest to locate as many unused Orff instruments within the district that I could find. It was the end of the

school year and I had a limited time frame to begin my search, but nonetheless I was determined to set the ball in motion. It turned out that several schools scattered around the board had Orff instruments sitting in classrooms, virtually unused, and these schools were willing to part with an instrument or two. I was able to have this excellent assortment assembled at our school. In addition to the pitched instruments, I used a portion of the \$500 to purchase a variety of drums and interesting colour percussion. By the time school was ready to resume in the fall, I had a good starting point for building an Orff program for the Kindergarten–Grade 6 students.

My next challenge was to consider what kind of program we could offer to the seventy Junior High students, Grades 7-9, who desired an elective other than a choral music option. As a Junior High team made up of three teachers (four, including the Principal), we met and brainstormed (based on our collective interests and talents) a number of options to put forward to the students. I was able to offer an instrumental band option and jazz choir option. The other two teachers offered an Outdoor Ed and Sports option and the Principal offered a Visual Arts option. At a Junior High assembly, the seventy students were presented with the various elective possibilities and selected their top three choices. Students were scheduled into the options accordingly and we began the electives the following week. I ended up with fifteen students assigned to the instrumental option. Because the students had never been exposed to any instrumental music instruction and because there was a such a wide range of interests and talents amongst them (including one

pianist, three guitar players and one drummer), I decided that it might be best if I modified our beginning band to become a beginning jazz band ensemble. I put this idea to the students, who jumped at the opportunity to play music that they considered to be much more *interesting*. There were a number of students who were keen to be part of a choral experience, but because there weren't enough students to constitute a full choir, I decided to create an extra curricular vocal jazz ensemble, which would practice one day per week at lunch and one day per week after school. I made the ensemble open to any parents in the community who might want to participate in a vocal jazz experience and in that way additionally promoted parental involvement. The Principal and the students participating in the ensemble enthusiastically embraced this new initiative. Approximately ten parents regularly attended the practices with the students. And so, the new direction began.

This new direction, however, was not without its problems. The first problem that quickly became illuminated, occurred in a class of thirty Grade 5 students who were more than reluctant to embrace an Orff approach, let alone any musical experience I might have to offer them. Based on the Principal's description of their participation in previous years (after my inquiring about their seemingly negative attitude towards music) I discovered this class had been described as quite a *handful* and they were one of the main reasons for the principal's determination that there was need for a new music teacher and a new program. It became obvious within the first week working with them that I would need to find more than the instruments and the creative Orff approach to engage and connect these students to

a music program. In an extraordinary moment of despair one weekend while planning for the following week's instruction and desiring to hook this class onto music, I decided that with this group, I would begin with an exploration of the musical *Little Shop of Horrors*. I decided to find a way to infuse technology, art, and drama in order to break up our week together (we had three classes each week) and hoped to more purposefully engage the boys who appeared to be the most disinterested and *disruptive* to our learning process. Our music class was no longer just about learning through Orff, but instead over the course of the first term, would evolve into something quite different.

In reflecting on this first decision, I now see that what I was attempting to do was *Deweyan* (Dewey, 1897) in nature, embarking upon an approach that required looking at the students' lived experiences and asking myself, as their teacher, how things might be otherwise. Their lived experience with music was not, it appears, a positive one. The focus of the previous music program had been concentrated on choral music and had left this group of students with specific impressions of music and music teachers. If I were able to move forward with them, I would have to "imagine forward differently" (Zatzman, 2009).

While viewing portions of the video of the musical *Little Shop of Horrors* (carefully and specifically selected parts due to some of the inappropriate language and subject matter in some scenes), students were given the task of identifying what they believed were key elements of a musical, in addition to noting the plot, characters and setting of this particular Broadway story. I chose this particular

musical for this class because I hoped it would appeal to their unusual sense of humour and need for the quirky or absurd. I also bargained on this production's inclusion of comedians Rick Moranis as the lead and Steve Martin as another lead to provide enough of a current context for them so that they might identify with a musical genre. This choice paid off and they watched the video with interest, enthusiasm and great delight. After reviewing together all of the information that they had recorded on their individual graphic organizers, we then embarked on a series of tasks related to the musical.

The first task that I designed for them involved using computers and the program Hyper Studio to create an artistic recount of the elements of a musical genre and the elements that they felt were significant to the overall production quality of this particular musical. Surprisingly, the students were extremely engaged in this task. The boys in particular couldn't wait for our class to work on their Hyper Studio projects about the musical. The calibre and quality of their work was truly amazing. From this initial activity, I was able to garner greater insight into their strengths as learners, enabled by having removed the pressure of performing in a traditional music class for which they had no affinity. The removal of this barrier allowed us to find a new rhythm of working productively together towards a common goal. The decision to involve technology and art began a positive process of change in both of us. Freire states in his writing, *Education as Practice of Freedom* (1964)

Practices of liberty free the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thralldom of silence and monologue. Both practices are liberated as they begin to learn, the one to know self as being of worth- and the other as capable to dialogue in spite of the strait jacket imposed by the role of educator as one who knows (Goulet, 2007, p. ix).

My desire to do something radically different in order to engage this class, lead me to seek out alternative pathways for them to enter into the realm of music.

Technology and art was used in this activity to give them another way of representing their emotions, thoughts and ideas connected to a musical composition. It was far removed from my original plan to teach them via an Orff approach, but I now see that it was actually more connected to the purpose of arts education, which is “not to transmit a particular idea, but to open up the process for seeing things anew, understand ourselves more fully, expand our ways of knowing and see the possibilities of alternate ways” (Zatzman, 2009). The further we embarked down this road together, the closer I was to fully realizing my new self as an arts educator.

Some people spend a lifetime attempting to live according to images that never quite fit them ... Whenever a knight of the Grail tried to follow a path made by someone else, he went altogether astray. Where there is a way or path, it is someone else's footsteps. Each of us has to find our own way ... (Campbell, 1968, p. 4).

The next task I assigned was for the students to work in groups of four or five to represent their favourite scene or scenes from the musical. If they needed any special costumes or props, they were responsible for bringing them from home. They were given three classes to draft, rehearse and perform their presentations. For a second time, I was completely amazed at how they committed themselves wholeheartedly to a task and did it with so much enthusiasm, energy and positivity. As I watched this entire task unfold, I couldn't help but ponder what this was telling me about them as learners. I began to recognize their need for something beyond what a traditional music class might have to offer. It was becoming apparent that perhaps what I was noticing was their need for an integrated arts approach that could blend art, drama, movement, and music and give them multiple entry points into our classes together. Our class was becoming a "place of possibility" (Hooks) and a place where the convergence of more than one of the arts was leading to agency, voice and reclamation of identity. We were finding our own way together and not following in the footsteps or path of traditional music instruction. We were not at odds with one another, as we had been in the first week of music class, but instead were participating productively with one another inside a new structure. It was as if we had created a "Third Space" (Bhabha, 1994). We had deconstructed the binary of traditional music class (which had guided my training as a music teacher) and the students' previous lived experience within a *choral-only* music setting and we were now operating with hybridity, as suggested in Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994).

The hybrid moment of political change– the transformation value of change lies in the re-articulation or translation of elements that are neither the something else beside which contests the terms and territories of both. By exploring the Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of ourselves (Bhabha, 1994, p. 39).

We reached the point where we would now be engaging in the third task, which involved creating musical performances of some of the songs from the musical, using the Orff instruments, recorder and movement or dance. This would be the *moment of truth*. Embarking on this final task, I would find out if what we had built together over the past six weeks were a sufficient enough foundation of trust, interest and connection to allow us to successfully work on music together and reconnect to what I had traditionally held onto as the *real elements* of a music program. The goal was to develop musical performances of three songs from the musical; the theme song *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Downtown* and *Mean Green Mother from Outer Space*. I envisioned the theme song incorporating group choreography. For this I drew on the skills of two of the girls in the class who were very involved with dance as well as one of the junior high students and these students worked along side of me to teach the rest of the class the key moves which would punctuate our performance. As I had hoped, the class was eager to learn this upbeat and energizing song and had no hesitation to add the choreography throughout the song. We had a great deal of fun and laughs in preparing this

performance piece. It was through the evolution of this performance piece that I rediscovered the “potential of the arts to invigorate learning” (Cornett & Smithrim, 2001, p. 2).

The next song selected for learning would need to be strategic decision. Should I continue with this energy captured in the singing and choreographic movements and work with them in unfolding *Mean Green Mother from Outer Space* or were they ready to delve into learning the Orff accompaniment and recorder for the slower ballad *Downtown*? I decided to put this question to the class and asked for their input as to which one we would work on next. To my surprise, they wanted to begin learning how to create accompaniments using the Orff instruments and learn the recorder part for the melody of the song *Downtown*. Perhaps this decision was partly due to their witnessing what could be accomplished with the Orff instruments, since earlier in the month, during an assembly, I had arranged for the Grade 4 and Grade 6 classes to perform a couple of Orff arrangements of songs from the Disney movies *Aladdin* and *Space Jam*. I wonder if seeing students close to their age level singing, playing the recorder and accompanying the songs with the Orff instruments provided added incentive for them? Or perhaps it was also because I had given them agency in the decision of what we would be learning next? Either way, it was clear that the students now had a new relationship to learning via an Orff approach– “relationship is the critical factor for risk to take place” (Zatzman, 2009). I contend that because of our newfound relationship with one another and a renewed view or perspective of what

music class *could be*, the students were able to learn the entire arrangement and recorder part in less than two weeks. We were extremely proud of this learning experience.

We moved on to the final song, which was a choral version of *Mean Green Mother from Outer Space*, which required two and sometimes three part vocal harmonies. The class rose to the occasion and the students were exceedingly proud of their efforts. They had discovered the *good feeling* that comes from working together to successfully complete a challenging task. The self discipline that was required to master the instruments, learn the steps for the dance or choreography and learn via the arts; the value of sustained work and understand and appreciate its connection to excellence (Pitman, 1998) was realized. Students asked if the class would be able to perform the three songs in the next school assembly. This was the break through moment that I had been waiting for, a sincere connection to learning music in a positive way and a pulling together of us as a community of learners. We had negotiated together a new way of being in class together. “The mark of a successful educator is not skill in persuasion– which is but an insidious form of propaganda– but the ability to dialogue with educatees in a mode of reciprocity” (Goulet, 2007, p. xii).

The fall term with this Grade 5 class set the next stage for the changes in the directions I would make as a music teacher, not only at this school, but also in other contexts and locations in subsequent years as an arts educator. For the remainder of the school year, I embarked on an action research project investigating whether a

blended or integrated arts program would better engage the reluctant boys versus a purely music oriented program. With the permission of the Principal, I would adapt my program so that on one or two of the three days per week, while I worked with the various classes, I would involve art techniques and drama and movement activities in conjunction with the music instructional activities. This grew out of my increasing belief that an integrated approach would provide alternate ways for students to represent their thoughts and feelings surrounding the themes and ideas we were exploring in the music. I discovered that the boys (who in many of the classes were ones I would describe as low level participants) gradually participated more in the music activities after the inclusion of art and drama activities within each week. The boys in particular displayed a stronger connection and commitment to our time together. One particularly inspiring moment that affirmed the changes I was making to an integrated approach were a worthwhile pursuit, came when I was on duty one lunch hour. While walking across the playground, a small group of boys came running up to me and asked,

“Do we have music today?”

I answered, “Yes, we do.”

Simultaneously the boys put their fists in the air and exclaimed, “Yes!”

It was at that very moment that I knew the decision to move to a blended, integrated program was the right choice for so many reasons. “The potential for greatness may be encoded in the genes, but whether that potential is realized is etched by experience in those critical early years” (Nash, 1997, p. 56). Looking

back on this moment, I wonder if this group of Grade 2 boys was excited because they were realizing their potential in new ways. Was the new approach to music etching into their early years a stronger feeling of success that perhaps hadn't been fully captured by a *traditional, music only* approach to learning?

What came out of this action research experience was a permanent reshaping of my entire program for all the classes, Kindergarten–Grade 6. My program now incorporated art, drama, and dance each week in order to further enhance our journey through music together. Students were introduced to a variety of artistic representations and techniques as well as drama games and activities that would connect their thoughts and feelings to the music. An additional change that came about as a result of this program renewal was connection to the other teachers in the school. Working in collaboration with the other elementary teachers in the school, I sought ways to embody some of the curriculum themes that they were embarking on in the arts pursuits that took place in my music classes. For the primary teachers this integrated approach was enthusiastically embraced. However, for some of the junior teachers the changes were not so warmly embraced. The feelings these teachers embraced were presented to me in the form of questions such as, “Why are the students having art with you?” Or in statements like, “The students have already had their art period with me this week.” They also asked, “Weren't you hired as the music teacher? Since when does the music teacher teach art or drama as well?” So began my next and much more complex problem implementing an integrated arts program at the school, while in my pursuit of program renewal.

Over the next two years I worked on ways to invite dialogue with the junior division around the perspective of how frequently students should or shouldn't have the various strands of the arts. The opportunity for dialogue with these teachers (who seemed to have the greatest resistance to the program changes I had made) provided little success in achieving a sense of understanding or support. I still to this day am not sure what their difficulty was regarding the changes I made- which involved inclusion of other arts into my program. "A word or single gesture has tremendous potential to uplift another or to devastate. Spock's raised eyebrow speaks volumes. As Elliot Eisner put it, the subtle is significant" (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001, p. 5). But their questions and actions were not so subtle. Perhaps the questions they had of me had more to do with their understanding of what the arts can offer to students, rather than anything about my choices or practices as an educator.

As I reflect back on these interactions, I wonder how different the perspectives of the junior teachers might have been if I had been able to provide some experiences, research theory and contexts regarding the arts and arts education.

Through the arts, students have chances to come to respect unusual points of view and learn that relationships matter, and they learn how important the form of ideas and feelings are to the content conveyed- Marshall McLuhan's the 'Medium is the message' idea (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001, p. 5).

Perhaps if the junior teachers had been able to experience for themselves how embedded the arts can be within instruction they may have been less resistant to the broader definition of the role I had created with the students.

The arts for me are the primary form of human communication and how we might understand one another and look inward to understand one's self. "They give voice to ideas and feelings in ways that no other communication vehicle can, because they are driven by emotions and passions. The arts engage intellect, heart and body. They are unique means of knowing, thinking, and feeling based in imagination and cognition" (Cornett et al., 2001). Shared beliefs about the arts and learning as a process driven by emotion, imagination, knowing, I contend, is what enabled the primary teachers and I to be on the same page of understanding in our journey with the children. The junior teachers, it seemed, had a different belief about the arts and the process of learning in our respective classrooms. If I had been able to show the connection between arts education and brain research, then perhaps they would have opened the *windows of their mind* to new structures in our classrooms and schools and begin to understand why I was so passionate about integrating all of the arts in our renewed program.

If schools were structured on brain research, there would be daily music (arts) and movement. Student passivity during lectures would be replaced with hands-on art and drama activities. Engage students in experiences that call for feelings to be felt and expressed ...

Dramatic play and exploration of art materials have the potential to

alter brain chemistry, creating a feeling of optimism and well-being because it taps into brain chemicals involved in pleasure; dopamine causes elation and excitement, and endorphin and norepinephrine heighten attention (Brownlee, 1997, p. 9).

In her book *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (1995), Greene writes

We have our social imagination: the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our society, on the streets where we live, in our schools. I am reminded of Jean Paul Sartre's declaration that it is on the day we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our sufferings and that we decide that these are unbearable. That is, we acknowledge the harshness of situations only when we have in mind another state of affairs in which things would be better. Similarly, it may only be when we think of liberating classrooms in which every learner is recognized and sustained in her or his struggle to learn how to learn that we can perceive the insufficiency of bureaucratized schools. And it may be only then that we are moved to choose to repair or to renew (Greene, 1995, p. 5).

If the junior teachers and I had been able to have a dialogue about the way the students were transformed as a result of having access to an ongoing variety of arts

experiences, rather than isolated incidences occurring three times a week in one person's classroom or in a single period of instruction constrained to a particular slot in the timetable; and, if we could agree that we are all compelled in our work (each day) as teachers to find ways to promote the journey of learning for every child, then, perhaps, the dialogue wouldn't have been one of seeking to conform *another* to a particular role, but would rather be one of releasing the possibilities and the imagination inherent in that role.

In reflecting on why I felt then and still feel compelled today to embed all the arts into my programming, I see that these decisions are guided by the ideas expressed in Greene's address to the New York State Board of Regents *The Creative Spirit: Keys, Doors and Possibilities* (1984).

... We do not offer the young enough options that they feel good enough to seize. The arts are not taken seriously enough as worlds that can be opened up to all sorts of individuals if only they are provided opportunities to move, media to work with, keys for the doors, if they are enabled to crack the codes ... we too often forget that the primary purpose of education is to free persons to make sense of their actual lived situations— not cognitively, but perceptually, imaginatively, and affectively— to attend mindfully to their own lives, to take initiatives in interpreting them and finding out where the deficiencies are and trying to transform them ... (Greene, 2001, p. 206).

If arts programming in our schools is to have any density or sense of richness, then I contend it must have multiple entry points for students to express their ideas and emotions and this can best be achieved by an integrated arts approach. I entitled this case study *A Question of Renewal*, with the hope to interrogate and determine if the choices that I made when introducing the other arts into my music classroom were relevant and meaningful; and whether the changes were beneficial to promoting learning for all students as I moved forward in my journey as their music teacher in this particular setting, seeking to diversify their musical experiences. In looking back on these actions with renewed insight, I am able to move forward as an educator with a sense of wide-awakeness (Greene, 1978) and understanding surrounding the significance of my decisions and know that they are grounded by rich theoretical constructs.

If men are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change. They see that the times are changing, but they are submerged in that change and so cannot discern its dramatic significance ... Man needs to be integrated with his reality. If he lacks the capacity to perceive the “mystery” of the changes, he will be a mere pawn at their mercy (Freire, 1974, pp. 6-7).

Looking back on this narrative about renewal, I realize that the challenges and rewards I experienced in the process have helped to form the educator that I am today, and as Foucault might say, engaged me in the “process of becoming one’s

self.” A final thought– the following song embodies my beliefs, not only regarding the power of music, but it also serves as a metaphor for arts education, a model which embraces all forms of artistic representation which freely makes ourselves into not what we are, but what we might become in our journeying together.

Singing Together (Music and Lyrics by Karen Steffensen, 2000)

*Music is the common voice, the voice of every nation;
Reaching out through space and time, across the universe;
Messages it offers us, of hope and inspiration;
Thoughts invoked deep inside, to seek and understand.
If we work together, to learn from one another;
If we learn together, together we can share;
We can share an understanding of the world and its creations,
And the beauty of the songs of life will join us together in song.*

*Singing out, singing strong, Singing loud, singing long;
As we sing here together, together we share all the laughter and
tears, the hopes and the fears;
Singing together, together we are family.*

*Day by day our world is changing with each new creation;
Near and far the winds of change echo through the land;
Keepers of the earth all strive to keep our planet living;
Earth and air and water clean beneath a sky of blue.
When we work together and learn from one another;
When we learn together, together we can care;
We can care for our planet and all of its creations;
And the beauty of the songs of life will carry on forever in time.*

*Singing out, singing strong, Singing loud, singing long;
As we sing here together, together we share all the laughter and
tears, the hopes and the fears;
Singing together, together we are family;
Singing together, together, sing in harmony.*

(Click on the following link to access the audio track for this song)

http://dl.dropbox.com/u/17974672/Singing_20together.wav