



**University of Brighton**

# Early Music Education as a Tool for Inclusion and Respect for Diversity

Study Paper for the Bernard van Leer Foundation

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the topic of using music education activities as a way to address inclusion and respect for diversity with children. It is intended to inform the development of appropriate activities and indicators for the Bernard van Leer Foundation's Social inclusion and respect for diversity issue area, particularly those which address the use of music in projects with young children. The study starts with an overview of musical development from prenatal to eight years of age and provides a review of the significant processes and outcomes of music education activities aimed at bringing together children in divided contexts. It is apparent that cross-community development of music skills has been and continues to be an effective means of addressing prejudice with young people. The study includes the analysis of interviews with sixteen experienced practitioners in Northern Ireland regarding ways in which music plays a part in facilitating respect and inclusion with young people, and an analysis of five children's focus groups. It concludes with recommendations to bring this knowledge to the early childhood and lower primary school sector and some questions for further study.

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# 1. Introduction

This paper is set out to explore the potential of music and music education activities to address social inclusion and respect for diversity with young children. As explained in the Bernard van Leer Foundation's issue area framework, 'social inclusion' and 'respect for diversity' are symbiotic and mutually reinforcing terms with different emphases:

Social inclusion aims to ensure that all young children have a fair and equal access to resources, services and facilities which are conducive to their development and wellbeing. Respect for diversity aims to ensure that young children are exposed to and develop positive attitudes to diverse social identities. This includes promoting such ideals as pro-social behaviours, open and responsive interactions, social awareness, empathy, perspective taking, negotiation, anger management, conflict management and conflict resolution – among relevant adults, as well as children. (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2009, p. 1)

When referring to the above definition, 'social inclusion' and 'inclusion' are used throughout the text interchangeably. For the sake of clarity, acronyms, as well as technical language and Latinisms, are avoided as much as possible.

The paper is organised in four parts. The first explains the theoretical background of the study and the Northern Ireland context. After outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the study, the musical development from prenatal to eight years of age is summarised, and a number of international projects that used music to address inclusion and respect for diversity are reviewed. The third part presents the results of a study that looked in more detail at the realities and scope of using music with young people in post-conflict Northern Ireland, comprising children focus groups and interviews with practitioners involved in music activities in cross-community contexts<sup>1</sup>. The fourth and final part outlines a number of implications for practice, recommendations and questions for further study.

## 1.1 Theoretical underpinnings of the study: music, identity and young people's development of prejudice

Recent research demonstrates that music is a defining element in the formation of young people's identities (Hargreaves et al., 2006; MacDonald et al., 2002; North et al., 2000; Warwick, 2006). Warwick (2006), in a consultation of 533 young people living in England, found that 'Music' was the third source of hope after 'Family' and 'Friends', and was more valued than 'Faith/religion', 'Television' or 'Sport'. North et al. (2000) studied the questionnaire responses from 2,465 adolescents and found that music allowed them to satisfy their emotional needs, was preferred to other indoor activities and was listened to an average of 2.45 hours per day.

Music education research has shown how music is a powerful tool for individuals and communities (Hallam, 2001; Veblen & Olsson, 2002) and how educational institutions can be successful spaces to develop relevant music learning (Welch & Adams, 2003), hence contributing to the development of individuals' identities.

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<sup>1</sup> This report builds on a previous Study Paper that focussed on a sub-sample of the adults' interviews and was produced by the author while working at Queen's University Belfast (Odena, 2007a). For the present paper the literature review and the adults' sample was enlarged and complemented with five children focus groups.

Welch (2006) has identified infancy and early childhood as a critical period for the development of musical abilities and the formation of musical identity.

Children in divided societies due to internal conflict, nevertheless, grow up in segregated neighbourhoods and are likely to develop prejudices against the cultural forms of 'the others', such as flags, colours, sports, songs and folklore. Several investigations in Northern Ireland highlight how this systematically happens with children aged 6 to 8, and that respect towards 'different' cultural forms such as sporting traditions and flags can be increased with early intervention (Connolly et al., 2006; Connolly & Healy, 2004). While the importance of early intervention is clearly highlighted in the literature (Connolly & Hayden, 2007) it is also observed that the influence of the adults involved in cross-community education is paramount. Cairns (2007) argues that without changing the adults' attitudes young children have little hope of succeeding changing theirs in the long term. Johnson and Johnson (2000: 239-240) observe that in order to reduce prejudice in schools, children must live and learn within a 'culture that promotes the development of caring, personal relationships among diverse individuals'. Such schools, they observe, are built around three 'Cs':

- Resolving conflicts Constructively;
- Internalising Civic values;
- Establishing a Cooperative community.

In Northern Ireland the promotion of civic values in schools was addressed by the educational authorities until August 2007 with a statutory cross-curricular theme peculiar to Northern Ireland circumstances: Education for Mutual Understanding. This theme was not a school subject, but rather a topic whose scope was defined by a series of objectives which were taught through the medium of the compulsory school subjects (Department of Education, 2005a). The objectives of Education for Mutual Understanding were 'fostering self-respect, respect for others, and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions' (Department of Education, 2005b: 4-6). In the current Revised Curriculum the old Education for Mutual Understanding objectives are reworded and included within the area of 'Personal Development & Mutual Understanding' (Department of Education, 2007). Nevertheless, how civic values and respect for diversity are promoted depends on the individual school (Smith, 2001).

In terms of appropriate approaches to dealing with issues of diversity with children, Connolly (2007a: 20) advocates for programmes that deal 'specifically and explicitly' with issues of prejudice related to ethnicity, including culture and religion. He observes that 'much can be gained from critically engaging with children directly and encouraging them to reflect' upon their attitudes more explicitly (see also Connolly, 1998; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Nevertheless, more studies would be required to determine 'the most beneficial sequence' in which these activities may need to be introduced in different contexts with different levels of conflict and prejudice (Niens & Cairns, 2005: 342).

A number of researchers have identified the ideal conditions for activities in which children from different communities participate side by side, also referred to in the literature as intergroup or cross-community activities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000, 2006; Tausch et al., 2005). These ideal conditions include that participants of similar status need to work collaboratively to achieve common goals,

competition is to be avoided, backing from senior management and their institutions is needed, and sustained contact yields best results.

The social psychologist T. F. Pettigrew (1998) proposes a sequential model to reduce conflict between communities. He does not refer specifically to diversity in terms of different ethnicities but more in terms of communities in conflict generally and the salient characteristics of their members. The model contains three stages:

- First, the initial contact, where anxiety is likely to be more pronounced and where personal identity and inter-personal interaction are emphasised in an effort to 'de-categorise' the individual;
- Second, the stage when contact is well established, which affords an optimal situation with less anxiety in which the old salient categorization of belonging to a particular group is highlighted, resulting in weakened prejudices that are generalised beyond the activity;
- And a third and final stage in which, after extended contact, individuals begin to think of themselves as part of a redefined new larger group that comprises all communities (involves the development of the idea of a new community, or a 're-categorisation' of the old ones).

The above three stages may be used when considering practical activities and will be referred to in part four when discussing the implications of the empirical part of the study.

## 1.2 The Northern Ireland context

Over the last three decades Northern Ireland has become 'a useful testing ground for educational practices that can contribute to the reduction of community divisions' (Niens & Cairns, 2005: 342). Below the surface of normality and reconciliation after the peace process, Northern Ireland remains a deeply segregated society: in 13 out of 26 local government districts, Protestants are the overwhelming majority (in six they make up more than three quarters of the population) whereas 11 districts are inhabited mostly by Catholics (UK Office for National Statistics, 2004). Segregation is most acute in areas which were so called 'hot spots' during 'the troubles', where prejudice remains and is coupled with internal violence exacerbated by socio-economic problems such as high unemployment (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2005; Lloyd, 2009).

During the period known as 'the troubles', from the late 1960s through to the late 1990s, over 3,700 people were killed and tens of thousands injured within a population of 1.6 million people, due to direct fighting between (and often within) Republican groupings, Loyalist groupings, the British army and the local police (McEvoy et al., 2006; Muldoon, 2004). Understandably, the wounds of 'the troubles' are taking a long time to heal (Feeney, 2004; McKittrick et al., 2007; Myers, 2006). The school system still reflects the segregation due to the recent conflict with approximately 94% of children attending schools that can be classified as Protestant or Catholic due to the homogeneity of staff and students. Only over 60 schools out of more than 1,000 Primary, Secondary and Grammar schools are currently classified as 'Integrated', balancing their intake between the two main communities, a movement

that was started as early as 1981 as a response to the conflict<sup>2</sup>. This de facto segregation of the school system and other facets of society has been labelled as 'benign apartheid' (Cairns, 2007).

While some scholars argue that religious tensions reflected in the local media are not a feature of music education because all schools have to implement the same Northern Ireland curriculum (Drummond, 1999), others discuss the 'politization of music' (Hastings, 2003: 77-78) observing that, over the years, 'the two communities have developed an attitude of alienation from part of their culture, and folk music has developed political overtones' (Jarvis, 1990: 276). In an earlier analysis of Northern Ireland music teacher education, Jarvis (1990) noted that many teachers were simply not familiar with even one of the main traditional musics (the Irish folk music tradition, often associated with Catholics, and the flute band tradition, associated with Protestants). Local ethnomusicologists observe that, historically, music has been a forceful device for the expression of ethnic, national and transnational identities in Northern Ireland, and that the perception of the co-existing diverse musical traditions has been used to create a sense of identity that is culturally exclusive (Forker, 2002; Ramsey, 2003; Reily, 2006).

The quotation below depicting a recent violent attack (with a reference to a Loyalist song) is an example of the low-key violence that still exists but rarely appears on the international media. Nevertheless, similar non-deadly sectarian attacks are regularly reported in the local newspapers:

Much was made during the week about claims by travel writer Simon Calder that the 'Troubles Murals' are world class tourist attractions...Better not tell about the 18-year-old Protestant motorcyclist who was knocked down by a hit and run driver on the Shankill [a notoriously Loyalist area] during the week. He managed to struggle to his feet in spite of a fractured leg and other injuries. He was approached by three people who wanted to know if he was Catholic or Protestant. They asked him to sing the Sash. He did not know the words. Notwithstanding his fractured leg and no doubt traumatised state, they attacked him. He managed to get away and, while running for his life on his fractured leg, he heard them shouting that they were going to wreck his bike. And if he had made it to an ambulance, it would probably have been attacked by nationalist youths because it had just left the Shankill. (Anderson, 2007)

The empirical data discussed in this paper and its recommendations may be useful to other societies where community divisions pose obstacles for inclusion and mutual respect amongst the diverse peoples that share the same geographical space.

Before discussing the empirical data, the next two sections outline the musical development of children and a number of international projects that have used music as a tool for inclusion and respect for diversity.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the segregation of the Northern Ireland education system please see Connolly (2009), Gallagher (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2007), Integrated Education Fund (2007), Kilpatrick and Leitch (2004), and McClenahan et al. (2003).



## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Musical development from prenatal to eight years of age

Prior to reviewing successful projects that have used music to address inclusion and respect for diversity, we need to consider what the literature in music education and music psychology has uncovered regarding early musical development. This knowledge is important in order to know about the music activities that can be implemented with young children. Due to the length and nature of this paper only the most relevant studies will be mentioned here – interested readers are encouraged to go to Deliège and Sloboda (1996), McPherson (2006), Hallam, Cross and Thaut (2009) and McPherson and Welch (forthcoming) for more research-based literature.

Recent studies have explored to what extent children can hear before they are born. It is nowadays accepted that foetus have a certain hearing ability as well as motor reactions to auditory stimuli in general and to musical stimuli in particular. Tafuri (2008: 10) summarises some essential points uncovered from recent research as follows:

- The auditory system starts to function at around the 24<sup>th</sup> week in some fetuses and after the 30<sup>th</sup> week in all of them (Parncutt, 2006);
- The foetus reacts to sounds in the interior environment (intrauterine sounds of various kinds, from the mother's heartbeat to the ripple made by their own movements) and from the exterior environment (voices, sounds, music), with variations in heartbeat (acceleration/deceleration) and with movements, varying from brusque to gentle, of the eyelids, the head, the limbs and the trunk;
- The quality and quantity of the reactions depend on the sound quality of the stimulus, of the behavioural state of the foetus (deep sleep, active sleep, quietly awake, actively awake) and, in the case of musical stimuli, also probably on the effects of music on the mother;
- During the foetal stage it is possible already to bring about habitual reactions to certain stimuli. For example, babies who have spent the prenatal period near an airport do not wake up or give a start if an aeroplane takes off nearby. This phenomenon shows discriminatory ability of the foetus and the possible effects on learning that can be detected subsequently at the postnatal stage.

Newborns are sensitive to sounds and music and recent studies have demonstrated the following facts:

- The newborn demonstrate with various gestures their sensitiveness to sound and music stimuli. For example, they bat their eyelids, open their eyes wide and stare, turn their head towards the source of the sound and stop crying.
- They demonstrate an ability to distinguish sounds by reacting in different ways to the changes in any of the qualities of the stimulus - such as intensity, speed, timbre or melody – and they soon demonstrate that they have preferences.

- Some reactions by newborns seem to reveal a kind of memory and learning with respect to prenatal auditory experiences. For example, they prefer their mother's voice, they are soothed by recordings of the mother's heartbeat and by music that they have heard during the prenatal phase, and they show familiarity with loud noises that they seem to have heard before (Tafari, 2008: 10-11)

Because newborns can develop sensitiveness to music linked with the mother's emotional reaction to it, experts recommend group activities with mothers and newborns and early musical stimulation (Tafari, 2008; Welch, 2006). The musical development that follows up until the age of eight may be summarised in stages, as in Table 1 below. Nevertheless, these stages should not be interpreted as fixed thresholds, but rather, as sets of skills that different children can develop at different paces as they grow up, depending on the musical experiences encountered throughout their upbringing.

Table 1. Music skills development from zero to eight years of age  
(translated and adapted from Alsina, 2002: 32-36)

| Age          | Music skills development  |
|--------------|---|
| 0-4 months   | Children at this age experiment with producing and reproducing sounds, repeating them for pleasure, and generating the first coordination of body movements with sounds. They are also able to: produce sounds at different pitches (glissandos) and follow and sing basic melodies (around 4 months of age); recognise sounds from their environment; follow the rhythmic rocking movements of the mother independently, which will be a starting point for their development and understanding of rhythmic patterns.  |
| 4-8 months   | At this age, children discover they can: obtain from adults things they like, such as the signing of a song by their mothers; move within their environment to produce sound, for instance playing a rattle; babble the sounds that they have been storing and classifying so far (the first oral communication between parents and child appears).   |
| 8-12 months  | Around this age children start doing things intentionally, coordinating their movements and predicting the effect of their actions, for example, when regulating their cry to maintain attention. They also start showing the skill to: give rhythmic responses; pronounce the sounds of the vowels (around 9 months) and the consonants (12 months); sing, often repetitively, precise sounds (for example, a minor third).  |
| 12-18 months | At this age children develop the skill to react with body movements to sound and music (their tempo is between 110 and 120 beats per minute). Spontaneous syllabic singing generally appears around this period.  |
| 18-24 months | Signing songs and melodies becomes the focus of their musical expression. Children discover the use of the objects around them due to their characteristics, and at two years of age they do not need to manipulate the objects to know what are they used for. Following something that may be labelled as intuition, children seek the solution to simple problems without a long series of trial and error actions. At this age, the song rhythm and the body movement produced by it are more important than the intonation of the lyrics and its melody. |

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 24-36 months | This period is characterised by the rapid development of a number of musical skills including: increased coordination of body rhythmic movements; increased control in the production of high and low pitch sounds; body awareness and skill to follow a marching rhythm (of around 110 to 120 bits per minute); increased coordination of arms and of body parts when close to the body axis; songs with movements acquire meaning, as children are able to match particular body movements with specific parts of songs; increased imitation skills in terms of music as well as body movements; improvisatory skills using repetitive melodies; their voice range is approximately one octave (between D3 and D4) and they can easily sing ascending and descending intervals of up to 4 notes.  |
| 3 to 4 years | At this age children develop an increasing curiosity about everything they hear and see, and it is possible to start representing with doodles their visual and musical environment, but without a strict code (it is the beginning of their graphic representation of sounds). Children also start showing the capacity to: invent songs, dances and instruments; control their general body movements in relation with the surrounding space; increased control of their legs and their body parts further away from their body centre (for instance, they can follow with their feet the beat of a musical piece); awareness of left and right can be developed and with this, sequences of movements can be learned; they can sing whole songs, some with onomatopoeias in their lyrics; they discover the words' rhythmic possibilities (for example, it is easier to follow the rhythm of a song with the words); they differentiate between different tempos with relative ease.   |
| 4 to 5 years | This period is characterised by the continuing development of a number of musical skills, including: increased symbolic awareness that allow children a range of graphic possibilities to represent sounds (which can become a code and be used in communication); increased capacity for musical intonation; capacity to arrange a number of sounds following a criteria if played separately (but not simultaneously), although children are not yet able to infer general criteria.  |
| 5 to 6 years | Increased awareness of their body parts (in songs with movement); increased skill in combining different pencil strokes, which allows them to develop their graphical repertoire; capacity to follow the beat and the music rhythm with their upper body. Around this age the children start making relationships between different sounds and different shapes, their voices range from approximately C3 to E4, and they can sing ascending and descending intervals of up to 6 notes.   |
| 6 to 7 years | Around this age children continue to quickly develop a range of skills including: ease in musical intonation; increased interest for the graphic representations of sound and music; capacity to classify different tempos and to identify the music beat and accent (for example, to differentiate between binary and ternary rhythms); increased awareness and preference towards strong characteristics of music/sounds, such as speed and volume; increased graphic precision; developed inventiveness in making up rhythms and melodies; preference for irregular and syncopated rhythms, and general development of rhythmic level; capacity to synchronise the movement of upper and lower body parts with music, with increased balance and spatial control this will be a good time to start playing percussion instruments (see for instance Odena, 2008); the voice range opens up naturally approximately from B2 up to F4, with the possibility to sing intervals of up to an octave; the singing intonation becomes more accurate (this is the time to reinforce the intonation with any children with difficulties); two-part canons can be introduced; at this stage children value songs that tell a story and the lyrics become more important than the rhythm or the melody. |

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 7 to 8 years | This period is characterised with the children's development of the following capacities: development of their representative schemata to follow basic rules; enhanced listening skills allowing them to hear simultaneously two music parts (harmony); increased dexterity to classify, arrange, order and generate conceptual maps; increased capacity to listen to music quietly for a longer period of time; increased capacity to coordinate body movements with music (choreography); capacity to differentiate pitch variations down to a semitone; the tendency to accelerate the tempo starts to diminish; developed appreciation of more sophisticated percussion instruments requiring a level of precision for playing; increased intuitive development of harmonic perception, for example, changes of mode (Major, Minor), harmonisations, cadences, conclusions or in-conclusions of music pieces. |
|--------------|---|

In addition to the development of the music skills outlined in the table above, research has shown that the opportunities children have to experience different musics from the wider community will be influential in the maturation of their music behaviours. Welch (2006) highlights the following key messages from the literature, for education policy makers, early childhood educators and parents:

- The first year of life is characterised by socialisation into the dominant musical culture(s). The broader the range of experiences, the greater the likelihood that musical skill development will be enhanced.
- Assuming normal development, all children are musical and capable of a diverse range of musical behaviours.
- Encouraging participation in musical activities can have non-musical benefits, such as in the development of verbal memory, motor control, emotional awareness, and communication skills.
- Teachers of young children should look out for, encourage, and celebrate a diversity of different signing behaviours from the age of 2 years onward.
- Children progress through a variety of phases in their musical development. Adults need to be sensitive to the musical behaviours that characterise such phases and open to the possibility of growth. Rich musical experience can foster progression through these phases and may accelerate development.
- Young children should be provided with opportunities to compose and improvise, such as in invented songs and exploratory play with simple musical instruments. These experiences can provide the basis of the development of early, preschool musical symbolisation and notation. Teachers should remember that the sound should precede the sign.
- Young children are likely to demonstrate good signing skills if they have been sung to since birth. If singing skill needs to be developed, teachers should focus on mastery of the different elements (melodic contour, pitch patterns, rhythmic patterns, text) before the combination of these into the whole song.

- Early inappropriate disapproval of current signing abilities can lead to lifelong negative self-labelling of perceived musical disability.
- Girls often appear to develop musical skills earlier than boys. Parents and teachers need to be proactive in seeking opportunities to foster young boys' musical development and to counter any suggestion that certain musical behaviours are feminine.
- Policy makers for schools and the wider community should encourage parental participation with their children in early musical activities. In particular, early childhood settings and schools should have clear policies to promote a wide range of developmental phase-sensitive musical activities.
- The challenge for the early years music teacher is to celebrate the child's developing musical competencies and to provide a nurturing framework for musical activity, especially creative musical activity, that enables the child to draw on, share and extend their existing musical knowledge.
- Such a framework should include opportunities and time to make music, with lots of sound making materials and simple instruments, to create, review, polish, and perform (adapted from Welch, 2006: 262).

The above messages would need to be taken into account when designing and implementing effective musical activities with young children, if their aim is to fully engage all the children.

## 2.2 Using music education to reduce prejudice and promote inclusion

With the recent improvement of the Northern Ireland political scenario since the Good Friday Agreement (1998) - also known locally to Protestants as The Belfast Agreement - a few music projects are bringing together schools from both communities in a way that would have been unthinkable two decades ago. For instance, the project A Marvellous Medicine (Ulster Orchestra, 2007) recently brought together Primary school children of both denominations for a big final concert in Belfast; and the current activities of The Sharing Education Programme encourage 'cross-sectoral collaborations' between some school music departments ([www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk](http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.co.uk)). Musical experiences during childhood appear to create lasting 'bridges' between communities thus diminishing prejudices. Often, the main aim of these projects seems to be to bring young people to do musical activities together rather than to teach them a formulated set of civic values.

Music education activities have also been used successfully in other international contexts where there was an acute need for increasing inclusion and respect for diversity. Some of these activities and projects have been reviewed by the author for the European Union's 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme Project INCLUD-ED. Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education ([www.ub.edu/includ-ed](http://www.ub.edu/includ-ed)). For example, in Spain, festivals comprising public music student performances have been used for reducing the absenteeism of Roma children (Almau, 2005) and for promoting the inclusion of disaffected school learners (Rusinek, 2008; Burnard, Dillon & Ballantyne, 2008). In England, creative music projects and digital technology have been used to re-engage disaffected students (Burnard, 2008). In Holland, music workshops providing 'Memorable Moments' are being employed to promote respect for diversity in nurseries with a high percentage of migrant children

(Brenman, 2007). And in Israel, folklore is being used to bring Palestinian and Jewish pupils and their families together in activities undertaken during periodical cross-community school visits (Lichman 2006; Lichman & Sullivan, 2000).

In formal music education in schools and nurseries across Western democracies, rhythms and songs are introduced from a variety of countries to promote intercultural music education (Bonal et al., 2005; Campbell, 2004, 2008). Bonal et al. (2005) used this type of resources to promote inclusion and respect for diversity amongst children in Barcelona's Raval neighbourhood, which houses several economic migrant communities. In England, where the history of migration is longer than in other younger European democracies, the integration of different musical cultures in the music curriculum is required by statutory guidelines, which are supported by the publication of an increasing amount of books and resources – see, for example, the book on Music Education and Muslims by Harris (2006), or the examples of African songs and rationale for music education in a pluralist society by Kwami (1995, 1998, 2001). This trend is advocated worldwide by the International Society for Music Education, whose publications aim to disseminate research and materials to help internationalise music curricula<sup>3</sup>.

Another area that addresses social inclusion and which has a special Commission within the International Society for Music Education is Music Therapy ([www.isme.org](http://www.isme.org)). There are a variety of music therapy research and practice approaches. Some studies deal with the clinical applications of recorded music, for example in reducing anxiety in hospitals, while other studies explore the use of sound and music to develop social and communication skills, such as the investigations with children on the Autistic Spectrum (Bunt, 2006; Darnley-Smith & Patey, 2003). The latter studies understand music therapy as a means to develop inclusion and fall within the scope of this study. One of the techniques widely employed in this approach is the use of activities with percussion instruments involving sound exploration, free improvisation, question and answer, and many other games and exercises (King, 2004).

The use of percussion instruments, sometimes self-made, is a technique that is also used in mainstream elementary music education because it facilitates the following aspects:

- It allows for direct manipulation of the object that produces the sound (a string, a membrane, a sound box, etc.) thus facilitating the understanding of how it works to all children;
- It facilitates the participation and inclusion of all learners regardless of differing abilities, that is, without the negative labelling of any student;
- It promotes musical collaboration amongst equals.

This approach to inclusive music education has also been employed with success in the initial teacher education of nursery school teachers (see picture below), many of

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<sup>3</sup> The flagship publication of the International Society for Music Education is the *International Journal of Music Education*, published by SAGE. Articles focussed on research and materials from different music cultures regularly appear in this journal – see, for instance, the articles by Dontsa (2008), McCarthy (1997), Minott (2008) and Prescott et al., (2008).

whom perceived themselves as non-musical at the start of their course (Odena, 2008).

A collection of instruments hand-made by nursery student teachers at the University of Barcelona.



As exemplified in this section, the terms ‘social inclusion’ and ‘respect for diversity’ have different interpretations in music education comprising, at least, (a) the inclusion of students of different abilities in mainstream and special education, and (b) the respect for and inclusion of music of different cultures. A variety of terms are used in different areas of knowledge such as psychology, sociology and education, and it seems crucial for any project addressing inclusion and diversity to agree a definition of such terms from the outset between all those involved, including teachers, parents and project designers.

The next two sections discuss the adults and children’s perceptions of some of these issues, collected in the empirical part of this study.

## 3. The empirical study

### 3.1 A two stage data collection: adults' and children's views

The above review shows that in contexts where there are underlying tensions and lack of social inclusion, there is potential for developing music projects to ameliorate the problems. With the recent political improvement in Northern Ireland, important knowledge may be gained here with relevance for the design of cross-community projects elsewhere. However, there is a lack of information on what works, what are the keys for successful collaborative music education activities across the Northern Ireland divide, and how to adapt the projects for young children – as 'respect for diversity' initiatives with younger children have been proven to maximise the intervention's results (Connolly, 2007b; Connolly, Hayden & Levin, 2007; Hayden & Odena, 2008).

Therefore, one of the main aims of this study was to explore the keys of how to develop music skills while bringing young children from Protestant and Catholic communities together – thus addressing inclusion and respect for diversity. In order to gather valuable first-hand information currently missing from the research literature, the task of interviewing key practitioners with cross-community music education experience seemed the logical step to follow. In a second stage, focus groups with children in cross-community settings were also carried out. The methodology and results of both stages are discussed in the following sections.

### 3.2 Findings from the interviews with key practitioners

#### 3.2.1 Methodology

After the review of previous and current projects and relevant documents, a number of practitioners involved in music education activities with young people were approached and sixteen were finally interviewed. The sample was 'purposive', starting with music teacher educators from the main colleges in Northern Ireland, and was increased by asking all participants for more contacts. The Northern Ireland Council of Integrated Education also facilitated contact details of teachers and schools. The final sixteen interviewees were selected following a 'maximum variation' sampling approach, taking into account their potential as 'key informants' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They were chosen in line with the following criteria: having extended experience in cross-community educational activities; and having worked in at least two different contexts. Participants included practitioners with experience of Nursery, Primary and post-primary contexts. Two of them provided continuing development courses for teachers in the biggest Education and Library Board (the Northern Ireland equivalent of the English 'Local Education Authorities'), and visited Catholic, Protestant and Integrated schools on a regular basis. Another participant did her teacher education in England and, on her return, had worked in denominational and integrated schools. One interviewee was a composer/workshop leader with a well-known reputation for designing and delivering music education projects with children from different socio-economic backgrounds across the divide. Four participants were teaching children under the age of 8 in nursery and lower primary school classes.

Interviews were confidential and always set in a place chosen by the interviewee, and lasted between 25 and 65 minutes (with one exception which was shorter due to work commitments). In two instances participants were interviewed in pairs using a focus



group format, allowing for interaction between them, which explains their extended length. Difficulties regarding 'insiders' researching mixed groups in Northern Ireland, such as a tendency to relate to one community more than another (Donnelly, 2004) and the need to keep one's own background undisclosed (Carlisle, 2007) were avoided due to the researcher's 'outsider' Catalan/Spanish status.

The interviews explored the participants' musical backgrounds, their work, and their views and advice on cross-community music activities with young people. Questions varied depending on the work and experiences of each interviewee (see examples of questions in Appendix I). In addition, further clarification of issues and ideas as they appeared throughout the interviews were obtained, hence interviews developed into 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988; Odena et al., 2005).

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the exception of one teacher whose responses were written on a notebook. Transcripts were analysed with the assistance of the specialist software for qualitative data analysis NVivo, using thematic/recursive comparative analysis<sup>4</sup>. This process consisted of repeated readings of all transcripts, looking for commonalities and themes, which were tested with each new reading and evolved into a number of provisional categories. In successive analyses the provisional categories were compared with each other, which resulted in some re-organisation, merging and refining until settling into the final categories. The categorisation was discussed with a colleague researcher and a group of postgraduate students from Queen's University Belfast, which gave further reliability to the analysis.

Over two hundred and thirty pages of double spaced transcripts were analysed and thirteen categories emerged within and beyond the original research question, for instance, containing comments on the alienation towards the other's culture, the intergenerational differences, and the potential of music education for working together.

In the next sections the interviewees' talk is presented, as much as possible, in indented quotations or inverted comas within the text. This reporting style is intended to provide the reader with rich descriptions of the participants' experiences in their own words (Eisner, 1991; Cox, 1999).

### 3.2.2 Discussion of results

Following analyses the four more relevant categories to illustrate the topic of this study are Stereotypes and alienation, Socio-economic factors, Project advice and Music education potential. These will be discussed in the following four sub-sections.

#### 3.2.3 Cross-community perceptions: stereotypes and alienation

The participants that grew up in Northern Ireland felt that segregation was much more acute in previous decades. For them music education activities, often attended outside their denominational schools, had been a good way of addressing their own stereotypes:

Growing up here in Northern Ireland you were either a Catholic or Protestant, it was very much a definition of who you were, and the first time that I met a

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on this analysis approach see Gibbs (2002), Leitch et al. (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b), Odena (2001, 2005, 2006, 2007b, 2009) and Odena & Welch (2007, 2009).

Protestant was through the School of Music on Saturday mornings, and you suddenly realised they didn't have two heads and their eyes weren't closer together...it's very funny, but we had an awful lot of banter and I think a real realisation that these people were not that different from us.

However, the same teacher was still encountering alienation between cultures in some of her school visits for her current work. She recalled an illustrative instance with a nine-year-old boy during one school visit:

I nearly dropped because his poem was about how he hated the Brits and I said, "Have you ever met a British person?" and he went, "No"...and it was along the lines of, "If I met one I would kill him and shoot him dead"...and I said, "But why?" and he said, "Because they're horrible" and I said, "But you've never met them so how would you know?" and he says, "Awk, well, everybody knows that!" and it was just this absolute, to him it was an absolute truth that all English people are bad and there were no two ways round it, you know, and it struck me at how entrenched the views were...it struck me that we have so far to go.

Different musical traditions are still very much alive and these are sometimes perceived as exclusive for one community. Two interviewees expressed this divide as follows:

The historical background of brass bands is in the British military system and following regimental bands from England...so that tends to attract more Protestants than Roman Catholics. And similarly Irish traditional music is part of the folk culture of the Catholics.

I would regard myself as quite an open person and I have experience of living in other areas, but still flute bands petrify me because to me they signify the Twelfth of July and marching and things like that. I also recognise that they're a fantastic opportunity for children to develop talent and for many that, it's a very appropriate way of being part of the community, but it still frightens me because it's an alien culture.

There was a general consensus amongst teachers for welcoming change, but segregation and stereotypes, particularly in poorer conflictive areas, was perceived as very much alive:

People are still scared, they have concerns and you only have to look at our politics and how it has gone to the two extremes...[we are] very much clinging to the extremes because that's what they know

Another participant put it this way:

Last year we did a project with ten Protestant primary schools, but there's, I mean, there was no attempt whatever to try and broaden their view of what Irish music is, because at the moment they don't want to know, their parents don't want to know... On the Shankill Road you wouldn't do that at all, it would be stupid to do that. So I think I would respect completely the Nationalist tradition in Catholic West Belfast, and we would do then something different in Protestant West Belfast.

The musical stereotypes imbedded in the two communities – 'Loyalist flute bands' and 'Republican Irish traditional music' sessions - frightened some parents and were perceived as divisive by participants:

In this country music can be used as a flag or an emblem...it's like gang mentality, it's like this tag or that tag, so, you know, as a classic stereotype, you have Protestants, you know, loyalist flute bands, Twelfth of July marching bands, all that stuff. As another stereotype you have Catholic, republicans, Irish traditional music sessions. And those are the two stereotypes. Of course they, you see that, it's like any stereotype, once you start to dig into it, you see that that's not the case, but music has been used as a weapon to sort of define communities, define things.

Flute bands would be quite strong particularly in working class areas, housing estates and so forth, in the Protestant tradition, and that would recruit quite a number of males, and the kind of marching band tradition, and again that's a strong Unionist, Loyalist cultural identifier.

### 3.2.4 Views on social and economic factors

Interviewees acknowledged that their views were probably influenced by their particular upbringing. They felt 'fortunate' to have 'professional parents' or 'a middle class background where there was more tolerance', and also to have mixed with music students across the divide whose 'parents were professionals too':

If I had grown up on a housing estate here I might have had a different view.

The apparent low segregation in more affluent areas brought with it a wealth of (de facto cross-community) music and music education activities:

Quite often people would have come together for operatic, you know, operatic societies and choral groups and, again from a variety of traditions, there would have been a pool of performers...I would have freely attended different churches to perform a particular musical work. But again, I suppose, I would be speaking from a very sort of middle class perspective.

It works on the professional level and the leafy green suburbs within education, I think it works to a certain extent in grammar schools.

But cultural alienation remained in poorer areas, where the sort of music which people identified with would reflect socio-economic differences:

There is a social element to classical music in that well-to-do families will identify with classical music and children from disadvantaged areas cannot identify with classical music at all, so there's a major problem there...And I'm genuinely worried that because the funding for music has been decreased, in the last three years in particular, that we have had to increase our fees significantly and therefore we are discouraging children from areas of social need...So the only division that I see on a regular basis is nothing to do with religion or politics, it's got to do with social status.

A teacher educator observed that the 'distinction between Catholic and Protestant' was over-simplistic:

I think the socio-economic differences are more problematic...The 11+ [comprehensive testing of students aged 10-11] which actually results in probably more affluent middle class children going to grammar school education and more working class children going towards vocational education

has resulted in a divide that is much more profound than the religious and political divide and so probably exacerbates the divide.

### 3.2.5 Project advice: what works and what doesn't

In terms of activities, singing and composing were regarded as ideal to engage young children. Specifically hands-on activities that children could easily relate to:

The kids love...practical activities, that's when they get interested...when they're getting involved in actually doing rather than listening or just watching.

A nursery teacher observed that this type of activities had to consider the attention span of children of this age. Nevertheless, she explained that children were totally immersed in musical activities whenever they had a music specialist visiting the school. During a cross-community project her school was paired with another nursery school from across the divide. The project included visits to each other's school, accompanied with the mothers, in which the children's learning activities would start with basic observation of similarities between buildings and classrooms and then they would move onto joint musical activities:

We just say, you know, "We're going to a different nursery today to make friends and play with some friends"...we always take a group of mothers with us, so they have the benefit of meeting [and] they always make it a very social occasion, have tea and coffee and scones.

Music is something that goes down so well with that age group...[When the music specialist came] we did quite a cross section of rhymes and songs and then she told a story...and then used the instruments for parts of the story... it was very good, they sat really well and listened and then she asked different ones to come up, we always put their names on them when a visitor comes in...and she did mix the children, they were sitting very informally on the floor together and she called up different ones to do different things and they just had such fun and laughed and she did some action rhymes, you know, large movements with them as well.

In terms of repertoire the general consensus amongst interviewees was to ignore any type of music that could be related to one of the two main communities. The exceptions to the rule were Integrated schools (less than 1 in 10) and some denomination schools in affluent areas with an open ethos, where they would for instance teach traditional music (in both cases parents would fully support the school activities). Everywhere else it was felt that the most appropriate way to run successful music education activities was to avoid anything that had 'a political overlay or what might be perceived as a political overlay'.

The composer/workshop leader observed that 'all children are the same' and that he was just 'providing the opportunity for young people to be involved in something that they wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to be involved with':

The important thing is that the young people have the experience that they enjoy, irrespective of where they're from. So we basically just ignore [the musical traditions], just ignore all those differences.

Some participants were involved in a project that every year facilitated children from over forty primary schools the preparation of a few songs and a related new composition inspired on a given theme (at the time of data collection it was 'Trains:

to create a sound poem on a train theme'). This project, called Music Makers, brought together in consecutive days groups of up to six Catholic and Protestant schools, as well as non-denominational Special Education Needs schools for collaborative final performances and music workshops – see picture below.

In this project, and in similar ones involving several schools, one of the keys for success was to make clear from the outset that it was not a competition:

We really stress the importance that it's not competitive...it's very much to give the children an opportunity to get up and to show off what they have done and it's to encourage the children to be creative and to encourage the teachers not to be frightened of creativity.

A Special Education Needs school and five other schools form both main communities participating in a music workshop.



In fact, the primary school teachers' insecurities were listed as one of the obstacles for participation in cross-community music education activities, as well as the 'extra work' involved in this activities and the insufficient funding to pay for music coordinators or buses to transport children. An additional obstacle, apart from the obvious reluctance of parents observed in more polarised neighbourhoods, was the school principals:

Unfortunately...it's down to the value the Principal puts on music, you know...A number of principals do not understand the value of music [they] see it as getting in the way of teaching English, Maths and Science, and it's holding the teachers back, they don't sort of understand the value that children will get out of it.

### 3.2.6. The potential of music education activities

Conversely, certain schools were described as having a good reputation for music and were known to attract parents regardless of their religious background. A clear example of this was perceived to be a post-primary education institution of Protestant

denomination located in the university quarter that had a variety of choirs, orchestras, brass bands and Irish traditional music groups:

Certain schools will have a strong musical tradition...a strongly led department or somebody with significant expertise in music, and quite often parents and other older children will elect to go regardless of denomination to the particular school for the sheer musical experience...Issues regarding identity quite often just fall by the wayside. You would find that in Belfast with [this institution] for example, which has a very strong musical tradition, that Catholic children and particularly their parents, if they found that they have a particular leaning towards music, would want them to have the very best education in that and may send them [there] regardless of religion.

It could be argued again that these were not the parents that lived in the polarised neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, the potential to develop music skills while bringing children from both communities together regardless of their area was acknowledged by the participants' many positive experiences in their own education and current work with children:

Kids are equipped with the enthusiasm and passion and energy, they can inspire people like no other group of people can.

[Music] is a superb tool for encouraging children to work together, I think they get so much out of it and I think we totally underestimate what children can do with music, I think that...one of the greatest challenges we have is encouraging teachers to allow children to have a go...I've got to the stage now where I can see children not being aware of their cultural background and if you give them a task to do that involves percussion instruments and music and movement, they will throw themselves into it wholeheartedly and are quite prepared to work with other people in doing that.

There was scope for exploring other activities such as song-writing and bringing professional musicians into nursery and lower primary classes, due to the perceived impact that this type of activities had on young children, but additional resources were required for some of these activities. One teacher from an Integrated school made the following observation:

One of the greatest things that inspire children is to actually see musicians, have musicians come in from different cultures. And when they hear good live music played, that's something to kick start their interest. But there's a cost to musicians coming in, if there's going to be cut backs anywhere it's usually these creative areas... I think sometimes music can cut through barriers that all the great visual displays and wonderful things you have around you will not communicate. Music can cut through and communicate in a way that the spoken language and visual imagery maybe doesn't. It would be good to try and use music a little bit more to tackle the bigger issues, you know? Maybe song writing, in Irish tradition especially you have the whole song writing tradition, people put into words what they were feeling about their country or their strong passions and maybe there'd be a way of trying to bring that back in again.

Other ideas that were perceived as having great potential for integrated early music education were bringing more World Music into the schools (recordings, songs, musicians) and organising a network of school music teachers, specialist and non-specialist, to share resources and good practice:

It would be great to see if we could get a group of musicians together that could communicate music from different cultures and that could be something that could tour around the integrated sector and help maybe link in with some of our history or some of the other aspects of the curriculum.

### 3.3 Findings from the focus groups with children

#### 3.3.1 Methodology

An emergent framework for assessing pupil views, based on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), was used to explore the ways in which music activities were used in cross-community settings. Article 12 of the Convention gives children the right to express their views as follows:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

This framework conceptualises with four interrelated themes the children's rights to express views and to have their views given due weight (Lundy, in Leitch et al., 2007a):

- Space: children must be given the opportunity to express a view.
- Voice: children must be facilitated to express their views.
- Audience: the view must be listened to.
- Influence: the view must be acted upon as appropriate.

Five focus groups were carried out with children from nursery and lower primary integrated classrooms, ranging from 4 to 8 and a half years of age. Thirty children participated in total, six in each focus group. The focus groups were arranged by two teachers working in the Integrated sector, and were carried out alongside school staff who were familiar with the children. This process assured that the interaction with the children and the information gathered was genuine, and not just repeated from what the other children said. The study was carried out following the research design and protocol approved by the Ethics Committee at Queen's University Belfast. The requirements of the protocol included: using stickers with invented names during focus groups (with the children who could write); arranging the school visits with the teachers weeks in advance; carrying out the focus groups alongside a member of school staff; obtaining police clearance to work with children; and careful consideration to the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004) when collecting data and disseminating the results.

All the pupils attended general music classes or, in the case of nursery children, they had regular music activities every week. The children's views on music activities in- and out-of-school were explored by means of creative research methods that empathetically engaged and stimulated participants to observe and analyse their experiences, and give meaning to them. These methods, which had been used in other projects, include classroom observation, participants' drawings of classroom experiences, and the use of the drawings during focus groups to facilitate the eliciting of thinking (Miller et al., 2008; Odena, Miller & Kehoe, 2009).

Focus groups lasted 12-20 minutes, the final length depending on the children's age. During the first 3-5 minutes they were provided with pencils and A4 sheets of paper and asked to individually draw 'how do you feel when you are in a music class with

your teacher'. After 3-5 minutes, even if the drawings were not completed, children were asked a number of questions, allowing for interaction between participants (see examples of questions in Appendix I). The next sections include the results of the thematic analysis of the full transcripts of the focus groups, which were analysed manually due to the relative size of the dataset.

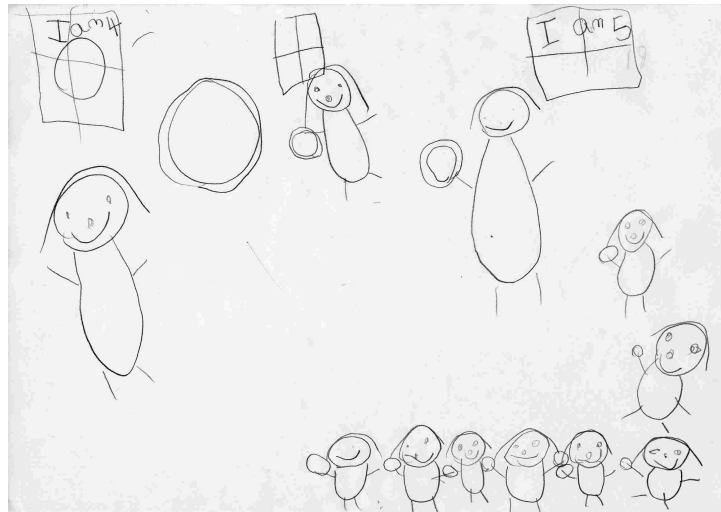
### 3.3.2 Discussion of results

Following analyses, the most relevant emerging themes to illustrate the topic of this study are Children's views on music in integrated classrooms and Children's preferences and personal uses of music. These will be discussed in the following two sub-sections.

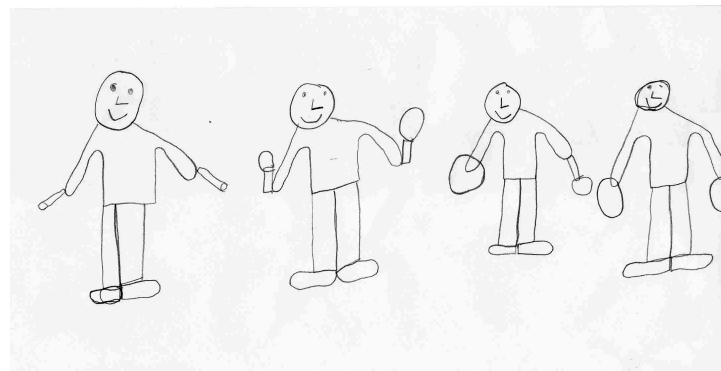
### 3.3.3 Children's views on music in integrated classrooms

Children appeared not to be concerned about the background of their friends during music education activities and observed they liked participatory activities, where everybody was included, for example signing or playing percussion instruments:

Music activity in a Primary 1 class drawn by a four-year-old child



Pupils playing percussion instruments together, drawn by a six-year-old child



They also liked playing other instruments in the school, such as the guitar, piano or drums, sometimes because they also had these instruments at home:



I've got a Hannah Montana keyboard [at home] and I play it.

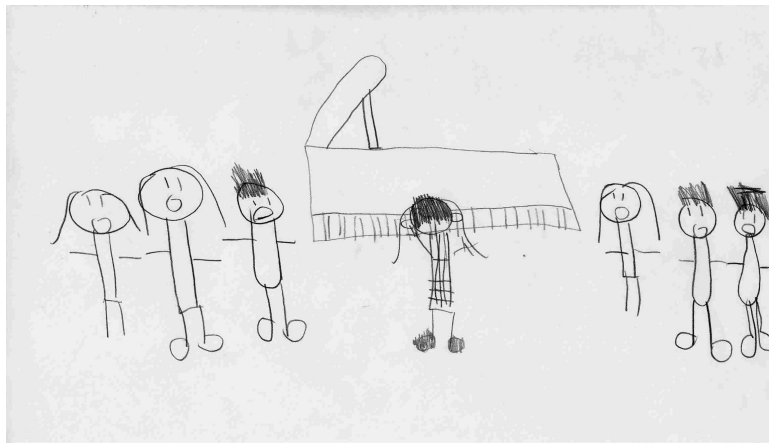
[Child 1, five and a half] I like guitars more because I've got a guitar at home. My daddy plays it all the time...

[Interviewer] What does he play?

[Child 1] He plays kind of [indistinct] music and makes noise. He always jumps and he makes us sing as well, he shakes the whole house.

[Child 2] See my Dad, he plays my drums so much, he plays them so loud that the house nearly collapses.

Pupils singing together in a music class, drawn by a five year old child.



End of term festivals and concerts were a highlight for pupils. Most children seemed to be looking forward to them and thoroughly enjoyed concerts and playing in front of other children and family members. The following drawing shows a public performance in the school:

Six-year-old child's drawing of the end of term concert, with herself singing on stage



### 3.3.4 Children's preferences and personal uses of music

Children participating in the focus groups, particularly older ones, reported using music at home for entertainment, enjoyment and sometimes because there was nothing else to do:

[Interviewer] When you listen to music, is it a particular time during the day?

[Child 3, six and a half] Sometimes I listen to it the whole day, like on Saturdays or Sundays.

[Child 4] Sometimes I have to listen to it when my mum's away out shopping. My Daddy's in the house, so I can stay at the house.

[Child 5, seven and a half] I think music's really fun if like it's raining someday then you still have something to do if you're bored and like you have a musical instrument and it's very fun to learn.

[Interviewer] And you say you sometimes listen to music maybe when you're at home?

[Child 5] Yeah I've loads of CD's.

[Interviewer] Ok, what time would you listen to music, or what would you use it for?

[Child 5] I kind of listen to it like if maybe I'm bored or maybe transfer [it] onto my phone or something.

[Interviewer] Anybody else uses music at home?

[Child 6] Yeah I do. Most of the time when I'm sleeping I don't have very nice dreams so my Mum she gets me Roald Dahl CD's...so then I can listen to Roald Dahl when I'm sleeping so I don't have any nightmares.

Some of the children observed they liked playing instruments for the sheer enjoyment of 'making big sounds', and also liked playing in front of their families. Two 7 and a half year olds studying trombone explained this as follows:

[Child 7] I like reading the notes and making big sounds with the trombone.

[Child 8] I like making songs for my family.

[Child 7] Yes, I always do that.

[Interviewer] Do they like it when you play in front of them?

[Child 8] Yes, they do.

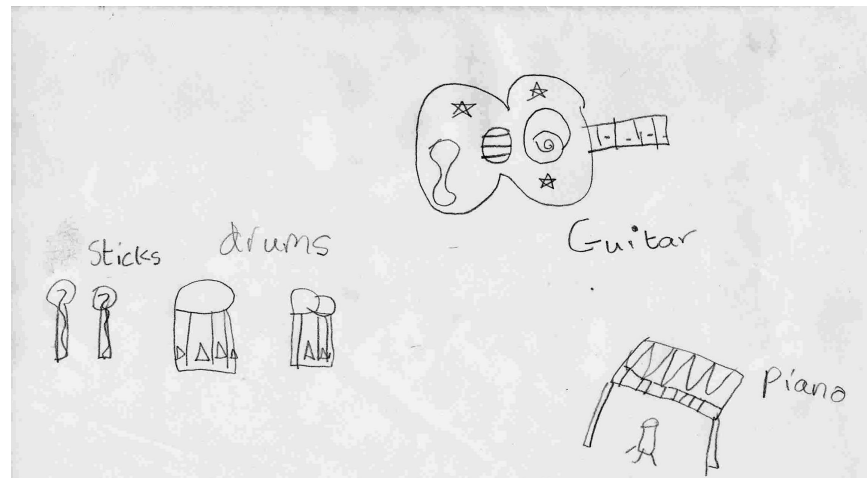
[Child 7] Sometimes they make me do it twice or three times just to perfect it.

[Interviewer] How important is music for you?

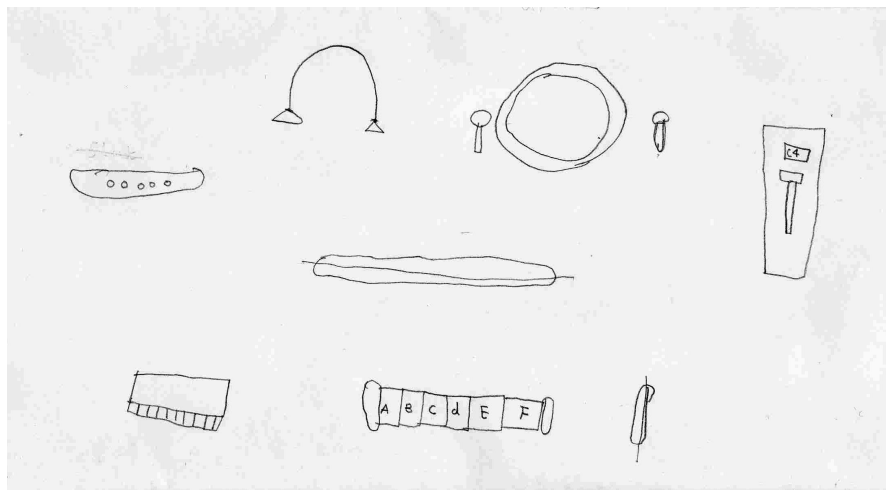
[Child 7] Very important for me, I think, because I really like my trombone and my Mum knows it. In fact you have to play very well to get your Trombone next year so you always have to practice. Sometimes I forget to practice.

The most articulate children observed they liked a variety of music styles, sometimes because their parents liked them too. As may be expected, their musical knowledge in terms of music styles, instruments, and music concepts increased with their age. Their developing knowledge is exemplified in the level of detail included in their drawings:

Drawing made by a six and a half year old child, incorporating the names of the instruments



Drawing of instruments incorporating pitch names (made by a seven and a half year old child)



Overall, children participating in the focus groups expressed appreciation to the variety of school musical activities and liked music from different cultures and styles, and many of them were using music at home. Nevertheless, these children were attending integrated classrooms, which are currently only 6% of the total school settings and are generally located outside the most deprived areas. In this sense, these children's circumstances and views are an example of what can be achieved with children under eight years of age, rather than an illustration of the average nursery or lower-primary classroom in Northern Ireland. One of the teachers working in the Integrated sector made the following observation, which exemplifies the type of parental support for integration encountered in these schools:

Because it's an integrated setting, some Catholic children take first communion, so as a [school] choir we would sing and provide the music for that. That means that a lot of our children from Protestant traditions would be part of the choir

that would partake in that service....And their parents are obviously on the whole willing to allow them to come in to a different religious environment to sing in the choir. And I always find that that is actually probably one of our main if you like cross-community or integrated events, because children who would never really ever be inside a Catholic church, Protestant children, would then be inside the chapel and singing, which I think is actually a very positive signal within the integrated sector. That's something we do every year. Those songs would be quite religious in a sense because they're for a mass. But in general the children don't complain about it or the parents don't have any objection to it and it's positive that they're part of it.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Implications for the design and implementation of early music education activities as a way to address social inclusion and respect for diversity

In the contexts described by participants there were different aims and approaches to cross-community early music education activities. An implication from this study is that such activities appeared to be successful as long as they were led by confident facilitators able to engage all the children. Variable interpretation of the approaches ranged from avoiding any potentially contentious issues, to the study of the different musical traditions (for example in integrated schools and in contexts outside 'hot spots' and with recognised musical expertise). As observed earlier, Pettigrew (1998) proposes a sequential model to reduce conflict between communities containing three stages, which can help to understand the participants' experiences:

- (a) First, the initial contact, where inter-personal interaction is emphasised in an effort to 'de-categorise' the individual;
- (b) Second, the stage when contact is well established, which affords an optimal situation with less anxiety in which the old salient categorization of belonging to a particular group is highlighted;
- (c) And a third and final stage in which, after extended contact, individuals begin to think of themselves as part of a redefined new larger group.

Many music education activities recalled by teachers would fall within the first stage, that is, ignoring any type of music that could be related to one of the two main communities, hence de-categorising the individuals and the environment. Experiences of cross-community musical activities such as Saturday rehearsals of youth orchestras facilitated this 'neutral' environment in which young people could build friendships beyond their group (first stage). Meeting regularly would lead to a more relaxed context where group belonging was informally highlighted and prejudices weakened (second stage): 'we had an awful lot of banter and...a real realisation that these people were not that different from us'. Some of the adults interviewed could be located within a redefined new larger group (third stage), arguably, thanks to the opportunities they had while growing up, but this stage could not be extended to all their students.

For the early childhood and lower-primary school sector a clear implication from this study is that music in integrated contexts was effective as long as the activities were engaging all children and were led by confident teachers/facilitators. One of the recommendations outlined below is for new projects to focus on schools in deprived areas. In a study of inter-group contact in two Arab-Israeli schools, Hughes (2007) found that although the schoolwork facilitated prejudice reduction between children, there were countervailing forces including the social inequalities in the wider Israeli society. The challenge for the schools was how to develop attitudes that could then be generalised within a wider societal context that Arabs perceived as highly discriminatory towards them.

The situation in Northern Ireland is clearly not the same, but the political and social baggage of many people living in polarised neighbourhoods could have a similar effect. Paraphrasing Hughes (2007: 435), the challenge that some schools and nurseries face is how cross-community music projects can improve attitudes that are generalisable beyond the educational setting within the wider context of the school's

polarised neighbourhood, where most people perceive the other community as a threat ('On the Shankill Road you wouldn't do that at all, it would be stupid to do that'). A recent ten year longitudinal study of social attitudes to community relations highlights that 73% of Catholics believe that Protestants are treated better and that Protestants have an increasing 'desire to live and work in isolation from the other community' (Hughes & Donnelly, 2001: 19).

Finally, an important implication is to focus potential projects on younger children and their parents, as this appears to maximise their impact, including the children's musical development and the contact opportunities for the parents themselves. In a meta-analysis of previous research Kenworthy et al. (2005) observe that the intergroup anxiety, which stems from the anticipation of negative consequences of cross-community contact, is likely to be increased by minimal prior contact. Therefore, not doing anything during early childhood can be counterproductive: the sooner the contact is made the better.

## 4.2 Recommendations

From the key practitioners' experiences it seems that progress is being made in the breaking down of barriers, and this might bring more opportunities for cross-community music education. As noted, remaining prejudices combined with socio-economic factors in deprived areas do pose a challenge. Nevertheless, a number of recommendations for practice can be elucidated from this study. These recommendations apply to Northern Ireland but readers may also like to consider them when designing activities and projects in inter-group settings elsewhere:

- It is apparent that in successful cross-community activities, teachers, schools and nurseries participate on a voluntary basis. If hesitant schools are to be involved in future projects, they may like to be involved in their design. As observed in the literature successful inter-group activity includes co-operative work towards a commonly agreed goal.
- For small localised projects the initial implementation drive may have to come from organisations rather than individuals (for instance, Lloyd (2009) found that half of 130 young males interviewed for a study of their experiences of conflict in Northern Ireland reported benefiting from cross-community activities but that none of the young males interviewed contributed in setting up the activities);
- In large multi-site projects the outcomes and processes would need to be agreed with the local schools/nurseries and may benefit from being implemented with the collaboration of local organisations (see for example the after-school clubs run by the Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West, Dublin, <http://connect.southdublin.ie/cdi/index.php>);
- It would appear that the approach more appropriate to carry out such projects is a collaborative action research, where aims and activities are set and periodically reviewed through individual and collaborative work and reflection<sup>5</sup>;

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of this approach see, for instance: Cabrera, Lluna & Odena (2006), Cain (2008), Odena & Cabrera (2006), Odena (2007c, 2007d) and Pine (2009). For a more comprehensive research-based volume refer to *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice* (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

- Teachers would need to be provided with support in the form of training and development, especially nursery and generalist primary school teachers who might feel insecure implementing creative musical activities;
- Cross-community contact should be sustained in order to develop greater attitudinal change (other key issues regarding the type of contact include the need to promote activities in a range of contexts to maximise generalization to other situations);
- There is a need for intervention programmes to be rigorously evaluated (Connolly, 2007b), including not only the assessment of attitudes but also the assessment of the 'societal indicators of success' such as shifts in friendship patterns (Hughes, 2009);
- Teachers need time and space to develop an understanding of their own values to avoid reinforcing 'the psychological barriers which sustain division' particularly as curriculum implementation is down to the individual teacher (Donnelly, 2004: 263). As Smith (2001: 138) noted in his investigation of schools as institutions for peace, teachers are all product of their environment: it is 'very easy to pass on preconceived social-political ideas' that children are quick to pick up on;
- Schools in affluent areas appear to have lower levels of segregation than those in poorer areas and seem to come together for collaborative projects when they wish to do so. Therefore new projects would need to focus on schools in deprived areas;
- Potential projects would maximise their impact if focussed on younger children, alongside their parents when feasible. This is supported by the literature (Connolly, 2007b; Tafuri, 2008) and the discussion of the interviews;
- Lastly, projects would need to offer something that entices children (fun), parents (quality) and schools (status), focussing on engaging musical experiences for all participants.

### 4.3 Questions for further study

A longitudinal study comprising the children's transitions to primary and later to post-primary schools would facilitate an exploration of any long-term effects of cross-community activities developed from the above recommendations. Other research approaches that could be utilised in future studies are comparative designs between countries, and also between ethnically divided contexts with and without violent conflict (the differentiation between 'ethnic conflict' and 'ethnic division' is used by Una Global - formerly known as the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity - when considering best practice for 'early childhood programs with a particular focus on the specific challenges and problems that arise from doing this in regions that are either experiencing significant armed conflict and/or emerging out of armed conflict', [www.jliced.org](http://www.jliced.org)).

As observed in the literature (Niens & Cairns: 342) more research is needed to explore 'the most beneficial sequence in which cross-community contact needs to be introduced in different contexts'. In particular, how the level of intergroup tension affects this sequence and the scope to introduce activities that directly discuss issues about 'the other' community at an earlier stage. In contrast to the wealth of literature

on developmental music psychology, there is little information available on how intergroup early childhood music education efforts actually affect children (this lack of information resonates with the multicultural early childhood education area, see for example Ramsey, 2006: 294-295). Questions for further study include:

- The mid and long-term effects of intergroup early childhood music education activities on the children's development of identity and civic values.
- The effectiveness of such activities and the research approach most appropriate to explore it (see for instance the instruments used for an evaluation of the effectiveness of a diversity programme with young children in Connolly, 2007a).
- The mid and long-term effects of the teachers' and student teachers' involvement in cross-community musical activities as part of their professional development.
- The children's (and their teachers') uses of music throughout the children's transitions from nursery to primary and post-primary classes.
- The significance of music in the children's, student teachers' and teacher's lives and in the formation of their identities.
- The degree of transferability of projects and ideas across different countries/regions/contexts.
- The differences in project design and implementation between contexts emerging out of armed conflict, and contexts without armed conflict characterised by ethnic divisions.
- The adults and children's understandings of the terminology used in this area ('inclusion', 'diversity', 'ethnicity', 'race').

To study the above questions we would need comprehensive enquiries that look for quantitative and qualitative data and engage all actors involved, including the children (Leitch et al., 2007; Ramsey, 2006). This may provide a fuller picture of the overall impact as well as the more subtle effects of intergroup musical activities and programs.



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## Appendix I - Examples of questions

### Interviews with adults:

#### OWN MUSICAL BACKGROUND

- What is your own background, starting as a young music student...?

#### WORK

- Could you explain what education activities do you provide? (Age level, type of students, etc.)
- Do students have any prerequisites for enrolling? (If yes, what are they?)
- How would you describe the background of your average student?
- Do you work the cross-curricular theme of 'Education for Mutual Understanding' in Music? (If yes, how?) [only for school teachers]

#### MUSIC AND MUSIC EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- In the past, did you feel that the two main school-communities were using music as a sign of identity? (How? Has it diminished?)

#### PROJECT ADVICE

- Could you provide some advice for successful music education activities where children from both communities participate?
- When preparing activities do you try to include music from both traditions or do you try to avoid anything to do with them?
- Would you like to add anything regarding any ideas you might have on cross-community activities/projects?
- Do you know of any other music education activities/projects that have brought together children from the two main communities?
- Could you suggest any other key practitioner?

### Focus groups with children:

- Could you explain your drawing for me?
- What are the music activities you most like in the school? Why?
- Do you sing, play or listen to music at home? (If yes, what do you sing, play or listen to? When? For what purpose?)
- Do you make up your own songs? (If yes, where? What for?)
- Do you like music from other cultures? (If yes, what music do you like?)
- How important is music to you?