

Hitting the Right Note: An Autoethnographic Investigation of a Secondary Music Teacher's Negotiation of the Music Curriculum

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Abstract

The focus of contemporary music curriculum in secondary classrooms has shifted from traditional heritage and the canon to popular music. Consequently, the curricula that music teachers deliver and the meaning of music education vary across schools. Within this context, this inquiry explored my experiences as a secondary-school classroom music teacher, focusing on how I negotiated the Victorian music curriculum to engage Years 7 and 8 students in music education. In this inquiry, I am situated in the in-between: I am someone who learnt music by reading and writing music notations and playing Western classical music (traditional musical knowledge), yet enjoys playing jazz, gospel and popular music (contemporary musical knowledge). I am a migrant who speaks both Korean and English, yet I have not fully belonged to either Korean or Australian culture. I am a stranger who belongs to both worlds concurrently, yet not entirely to either. I am a teacher-researcher who approaches this inquiry as a centre of authority and a member of a cultural minority to examine power dynamics within secondary music classrooms. Therefore, my positionality of being in-between is the core of this inquiry.

Following inspiration from Bullough's (1998) argument that one must confront biography to understand educational events, I used a bricolage of autobiographical, narrative, and life-history approaches. Through retrospective autoethnographic writing, I immersed myself in personal narratives drawn from my memory and artefacts, such as teacher planners and exam or test templates I had created. To develop, analyse and interpret my personal narratives, I used Pinar's (1994) currere method and Jackson and Mazzei's (2011) notion of *thinking with theory* to challenge traditional forms of qualitative data analysis, such as themes and coding. Narrative analysis has been adopted to illustrate how my personal narratives emerged.

This inquiry is grounded in the notion of critical pedagogy, affect theory, situated knowledge and intra-action. These theoretical frameworks are not applied sequentially but are read with my personal narratives simultaneously to produce new understanding.

Significant insights produced throughout this thesis are that, firstly, the

banking model of education is not solely a philosophical or abstract concept, but an embodied phenomenon that circulates through a learner's body. Secondly, it also explains why Western classical music and traditional musical knowledge become *legitimate knowledge* in the context of secondary music education through *selective tradition* and *affective economies*. This shows that my experiences as a transnational music teacher, situated in the in-between, are not just personal stories but also enable curriculum negotiation through conscientisation. Lastly, this thesis argues that pedagogy is not just a choice made by teachers, but a phenomenon emerging from the entanglement of human and non-human elements (e.g., musical instruments, textbooks, classroom spaces, and school culture). This view provides a perspective on initial teacher education, shifting from teacher-making to teacher-becoming. This thesis does not close with traditional conclusions but remains open, inviting readers to stay with the trouble and to continue becoming, as this is *never* complete.

Student Declaration

Declaration of Authenticity

“I, Seul Kee Yeo, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Hitting the Right Note: An Autoethnographic Investigation of a Secondary Music Teacher’s Negotiation of the Music Curriculum* is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.”

“I have conducted my research in alignment with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and [Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures](#).”

Ethics Declaration

“All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), and Approval Number: HRE22-074.”

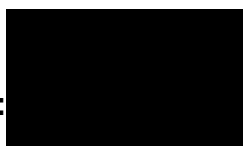
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Date: 16/07/2027

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List of Abbreviations

AusVELS	Australian Victorian Essential Learning Standards
CBD	Central Business District
CCM	Contemporary Christian Music
CD	Compact Disc
CRT	Casual Relief Teacher
CSAT	College Scholastic Ability Test
EAL	English as an Additional Language
F-10 Students	Foundation to Year 10 Students
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MEAE	Music Education as Aesthetic Education
MIDI Keyboard	Musical Instrument Digital Interface Keyboard
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OST	Original Soundtrack
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SAC	School-Assessed Coursework
SCAC	School Commission and Australia Council
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VELS	Victorian Essential Learning Standards
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching

Chapter 1. Entering the Inquiry

February 2013.

A Year 7 student shrugged as she addressed me, “Miss, why do we have to learn how to read and write music? We’re not going to be musicians.”

Other students nodded in agreement. “Yes, can we just play instruments?”

Why are they asking me such questions? Isn’t it obvious why we learn about notation? How can they play instruments if they don’t know how to read music?

In a fleeting moment, my **teacher-self** quickly responded. “Well, it is part of the curriculum. It is a useful skill, and once you learn how to do it, it stays with you. It takes time. You’ll get it eventually, so hang in there.” I had no choice but to teach it, and students had to endure it, just like I had done as a student long ago.

After hearing my answer, some students pouted. The class bell rang; students gathered their belongings and filed out of the classroom. That night, the following questions did not leave my mind: *Why do we learn musical notation? Is this obvious? If so, why?*

My **researcher-self** searches my memory once again for answers.

My **migrant-self** knows where these answers reside; it is how I learned music and piano in Korea. No one had asked me this question before. It is one I had never considered.

Polyphony

Please click on Jobim’s (2001) ‘[As Praias Desertas](#)’ as an accompaniment to my journey of staying with the trouble (what this trouble is, will be explained in this section).

I am a person positioned within and in-between two languages and two cultures. I belong to all, yet at the same time belong to neither. Circulating

between two cultures and languages, I am a woman, a migrant, a Korean-Australian, a classically trained pianist, a jazz lover, a music teacher, a teacher-educator, a researcher, and a doctoral student.

I am someone who enjoys listening to and playing Western classical, jazz, gospel, and popular music.

I do not speak my mother tongue daily and sometimes feel like I cannot express myself freely in English.

I am positioned between Australian and Korean cultures, fully belonging to neither. Being situated between the two, I want to ask both worlds questions that have troubled me since that day in February 2013.

In reflecting on my teaching and learning experiences, my research questions as a teacher-researcher (Stenhouse, 1975) emerged:

How do I negotiate the Victorian music curriculum to engage Year 7 and 8 students in music education? As I critically and retrospectively contemplated the ways I negotiated the music curriculum, the following research sub-questions emerged:

- ✚ How do I define music education?
- ✚ What types of content do I include in the music curriculum and why?
- ✚ How do I deliver the music curriculum?
- ✚ How is student engagement shaped as I negotiate and deliver the music curriculum?

These questions are not posed to generate definitive answers, but to be considered with multiple theories, to open up possibilities for understanding music education and teacher-becoming throughout this thesis.

Background to the Inquiry

This inquiry interrogates my own positionality, power dynamics and emotional responses to educational events within the secondary music classroom, revealing how legitimate and privileged musical knowledge and marginalisation and/or exclusion are enacted. The rationale for conducting this inquiry draws on Stenhouse's (1975) notion of *teacher-as-researcher*, which posits that curriculum planning and classroom pedagogy are linked and inseparable

(Elliott, 2026). It explores how I, as a classroom music teacher, negotiated the Victorian music curriculum through my own experience delivering different content across Catholic and state schools. In Catholic schools in the state of Victoria, Australia, I utilised my expertise teaching as a highly trained piano teacher in the “classical paradigm”, with deep knowledge of music theory, performance techniques, and the history of Western classical music (McPhail, 2013, p. 14). In contrast, I delivered the music curriculum at a Victorian state school with a different focus: learning and playing popular, contemporary music. I wanted to connect students’ lives outside the school to music in the classroom, to provide each student with the type of meaningful musical experiences that Green (2006) refers to as informal popular music learning practices—that is, students choosing songs with which they are familiar and learning them by listening and copying the notes without the need for prior musical literacy. I talked openly with the students about what they were required to learn and why such concepts were taught. I invited the students to work with me to modify the music program to generate a meaningful connection between their musical experiences inside and outside of school.

This inquiry began as I gradually realised, while negotiating the curriculum with students as a secondary music teacher, that my understanding of what constitutes valuable and legitimate musical knowledge and how music should be taught has been shaped by my cultural and educational experiences. Exploring my lived experiences as a Korean-Australian (transnational) music teacher, shaped across the different cultural and educational contexts of Korea and Australia, reveals how these teaching and learning experiences have shaped my interpretation of the curriculum and my response to students’ engagement in music education. Moreover, this inquiry provides an opportunity to examine the knowledge and perspectives on teaching that are taken for granted in secondary music education.

Significance of the Inquiry

This inquiry seeks to understand the music curriculum as a lived, embodied, and affective experience and is a response to “a call for post-qualitative inquiry” in music education (Southcott & de Bruin, 2022, p. 2). To understand my

embodied experience of myself as a migrant, transnational music teacher, educator and researcher, I describe and analyse my lived experiences that are “infused with political/cultural [and social, historical] norms” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 1) to articulate the Victorian music curriculum.

Music teachers’ conceptions of the curriculum, their realisations of the need to negotiate it, and how their responses are reflected in and managed within the decision-making and implementation processes related to the music curriculum have been explored by other scholars (McPhail, 2013; McPhail & McNeill, 2019). This inquiry extends this understanding by exploring the affective and embodied dimensions of curriculum negotiation through my unique positionality (across two different cultures and languages, at the centre of the authority, and at the periphery as a member of a cultural minority in the classroom). Thus, this inquiry contributes to knowledge by examining the purpose of music education and how I, as a secondary music teacher situated in two different languages, cultures, and positions, teach music in Victorian schools.

Focus of the Inquiry

As noted earlier in the polyphony section, this inquiry examines how I negotiated the Victorian music curriculum to engage Year 7 and 8 students in music education. Therefore, the aims of the inquiry are as follows:

- ✚ To examine how the implementation of a contemporary music curriculum affects students’ educational opportunities in music.
- ✚ To examine how the contemporary approach for students who do not have a priori musical knowledge affects their educational engagement with music.

Definitions

For this inquiry, *traditional musical knowledge* is defined as music theory, composition, and the acquisition of advanced music performance skills through the canon of Western classical music (Barrett, 2007; Hussain, 2025).

Contemporary musical knowledge is defined as popular music, such as country,

jazz, rock, and rhythm and blues (R&B) (Springer, 2016), and focuses on implementing digital technologies such as GarageBand and Logic Pro.

My Positionality

Roberts (2002) claimed that “individual lives should be understood not merely in terms of their uniqueness but also within a social context” (p. 34). Following Robert’s (2002) insight, I attempted to bridge the domains of public and private life by making complex details of my life accessible to others in public discourse (Ellis, 1992). My cultural background plays a significant role in this inquiry, as I learned music grounded in traditional musical knowledge in both Korea and Australia. The ways I learned music have affected:

- ✚ the types of content I include in the classroom programs that are based on the Victorian curriculum; and
- ✚ how I deliver the curriculum to Year 7 and 8 students (e.g., hesitant to facilitate discussions in the classroom due to my lack of confidence in speaking English in the past).

I (re)read my teaching and learning experiences through thinking with critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005), which frames education as a vehicle for cultivating critical consciousness and revealing social and structural injustices within educational domains (Tilley-Lubbs, 2021). Then, I reflexively examined how my unique positionality created both power dynamics and boundaries in the classroom space. I examined how my implementation of a contemporary music approach for students without a priori musical knowledge affects their educational engagement with the music traditions in the curriculum. I reflexively interrogated my embodied positioning in relation to my students, their parents, and colleagues to recognise the privilege and marginalisation witnessed and experienced.

Navigating the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters that unfold in a linear sequence. Through each chapter, readers are moved through my past teaching and learning

experiences. They are invited into my imagining of future possibilities for music education (how I would teach music in the future) and into my analysis of the present understanding of who I am becoming as a music teacher, educator, and researcher. As sound offers us “a distinct way of understanding in terms of being and knowing” (Baker & Anderson-Kunert, 2019, p. 2), readers are invited to listen to songs via hyperlinks. I have harnessed multimodality through music and images to retell my story. Thus, I challenge the academy’s hegemonic form of knowledge production, which has typically favoured written text as the means of collecting, analysing, representing and disseminating research.

In Chapter 2, **Literature Review: Contextualising the Inquiry**, I explore music education within the context of educational philosophies (idealism, realism, pragmatism, and experimentalism or instrumentalism) and contemporary philosophies of music education (aesthetic, praxial, experience-based, social justice, and open approach). I trace the ways in which the Victorian music curriculum has developed from the 19th century to the present. This chapter examines the different perceptions that classroom music teachers have of school music programs, curriculum content, and pedagogical choices associated with different traditions.

In Chapter 3, **Theoretical Frameworks: Thinking with Theories**, I explore the theoretical frameworks that underpin this inquiry and focus on the frameworks of critical pedagogy (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a). These frameworks are not treated as lenses applied to my personal narratives as stable data, but as sites where I think with theories to “produce different knowledge” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). These two frameworks are utilised to interrogate the power dynamics, privilege, and marginalisation that are inherent in secondary music education. This chapter also highlights the importance of music education as an act of love, care, and resistance (Darder, 2020; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2022; Metcalfe & Game, 2016) to provide an inclusive learning space where all students and teachers feel seen, heard, and valued (Rendoñ, 2009).

In Chapter 4, **Methodology: Composing the Inquiry**, I draw on Pinar’s (1994) *currenre method* to explore how my personal experiences were harnessed, how I imagined the future (how I would teach music differently), and how I analysed and synthesised the past, present, and future (to reflect on my

teacher-becoming). I examine how my narratives connect to a larger social and cultural context of music education in Australia and Korea, and my curriculum negotiation (Bullough, 1998), and how my story situates thinking with theory to “produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). This chapter engages with a bricolage of narrative, life history, and autobiographical approaches.

In Chapter 5, **Personal Narratives: Regressive and Progressive Moments**, I move through my teaching and learning experiences in both Korea and Australia to return to my past experiences, exploring the moments that shaped my present self (the regressive moment of Pinar’s (1994) *currere*), and demonstrating how these experiences connect to future possibilities, or imagined ways of teaching music in the secondary classroom (the progressive step of Pinar’s (1994) *currere*). In this chapter, I present five narratives of my teaching and learning experiences in both Korea and Australia. As these five narratives are accounts of my own life experiences, they do not include citations to academic literature.

The first and second narratives describe how I learned to play the piano and prepared for the university entrance auditions to study music performance in Korea. These narratives illustrate how I internalised and embodied traditional musical knowledge. This, in turn, revealed how Western classical music and musical literacy (reading and writing music notation) were positioned as legitimate musical knowledge, which I believed students needed to learn and acquire to succeed in music education. In the third narrative, I illustrate my experiences of becoming a pre-service teacher in Australia, including attending lectures and tutorials at a university and doing teaching placements at Victorian Catholic schools. This was to demonstrate the cultural, linguistic, and educational differences, as well as my struggle to navigate and adapt to Australian culture and the education system. The fourth and fifth narratives describe how I taught music as an early-career music teacher at Catholic schools and as an experienced teacher at a Victorian state school. These have been included to illustrate how my teaching approach changed as I incorporated contemporary musical knowledge into lessons, particularly towards embracing students without a priori musical knowledge. These narratives reveal the moments of my conscientisation (Freire, 2005) into the ways in which the music curriculum privileges traditional musical knowledge, how this marginalises

students without a priori musical knowledge, and how I changed the way I approached my students in the music classroom.

In Chapter 6, **Discussing the Inquiry: Analytic Moments**, I utilised the analytic step of *currere* (Pinar, 1994) and Jackson and Mazzei's (2011, 2023) notion of thinking with theory to plug my narratives into multiple theories (rather than applying them). While the theoretical frameworks chapter focuses on critical pedagogy (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a) to explore how these theories are read alongside my narratives, this discussion chapter examines how Haraway's (1988, 1991a, 2016) and Barad's (2007) theories emerged out of necessity during the process of plugging narratives into critical pedagogy. This chapter explores how legitimate musical knowledge was formed and reproduced in the secondary music classrooms and also examines how my migrant experiences produced material-discursive-affective economies. It also examines the moment when binaries and boundaries (of the two cultures, two languages, and two music genres [Western classical and popular music]) collapse through Haraway's (1988, 1991a) notion of cyborg and situated knowledge. Lastly, this chapter explains how conscientisation (Freire, 2005) serves in my 'teacher-becoming'. In this chapter, the same narrative appears multiple times across several sections; however, this is not repetition per se but rather a signal to readers that insights can be generated when reading the same narrative alongside different theories.

In Chapter 7, **Towards an Inconclusion: Synthetic Moments**, I present a reflective synthesis that intentionally rejects closure; instead, it embraces the ongoing nature of curriculum inquiry and teacher identity/subjectivity. This final chapter embraces uncertainty and fluid subjectivity—that is, teacher-identity and curriculum inquiry are continually shaped by personal, sociocultural, and institutional forces. In this chapter, I encourage readers to view curriculum not as a fixed framework and examine how curriculum and pedagogical choices can either perpetuate or challenge social inequalities (Pinar, 2019, 2023). This final chapter invites readers to reflect on binaries and boundaries and on the possibilities for imagining what music education and music teachers can become.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Contextualising the Inquiry

To contextualise how I negotiated the Victorian music curriculum to engage Year 7 and 8 students in music education, it is essential to understand how secondary music education has been conceptualised and contested. This chapter explores music education within the context of educational philosophy and contemporary music education philosophies; the development of the Victorian music curriculum from the 19th century to the present; how music teachers perceive the purpose of music education in secondary schools; and the ways music teachers negotiate music curriculum content and pedagogical approaches.

The changes in music education philosophies, curriculum content, and teaching approaches evident in Australia (including Victoria) are not unique to the Australian context (Cox & Stevens, 2017). Internationally, debates concerning the privileging of Western classical traditions and formal learning practices (Barrett, 2007; Green, 2003; Hess, 2019; McPhail, 2013; Philpott, 2017), the recognition of students' diverse cultural and musical experiences (Barton & Riddle, 2022; Walter, 2018), and the relationship between formal and informal learning practices (Carroll, 2020; Choong, 2023; Zhang, 2022) have continued in music education.

Music Education Philosophies

Music education scholars have identified several philosophical perspectives in the field of music education (Leonhard, 1965; Light, 1998; McCarthy & Goble, 2003). This section provides an overview of music education within the context of educational philosophy and contemporary music education philosophies to help readers understand the philosophical foundations of music education. This is because a teacher's philosophical stance shapes how music education is perceived, which in turn influences teachers' selection of curriculum content and topics, as well as their pedagogical approaches.

Music Education Within the Context of Educational Philosophy

Light (1998) classified traditional educational philosophies into four main self-explanatory categories: *idealism*, *realism*, *pragmatism* and *experimentalism or instrumentalism*. I will now articulate how music education is viewed within the context of educational philosophies and their relation to pedagogical approaches.

Idealism in Music Education

Idealism in music education highlights reality and absolute truth, manifested through abstract, a priori ideas, and independent of individual human experience (Beatty et al., 2009; Regelski, 2003; Tóth, 2024). These ideas, including beauty and goodness, are often considered and characterised as being absolute and timeless (Light, 1998). Idealist music teachers perceive Western classical works like Beethoven's symphonies and Mozart's piano sonatas as embodiments of absolute and universal beauty (Light, 1998). They situate art and music for pure contemplation (Regelski, 2003), to foster appreciation of reality, truth, and beauty, thereby encouraging exploration of abstract musical concepts (Beatty et al., 2009). By utilising these approaches, idealist music teachers employ pedagogical strategies such as prioritising the reading and writing of music notations to cultivate appreciation for the significance of music as a conduit to universal and eternal truths (Regelski, 2003).

Realism in Music Education

Realism in music education emphasises the tangible aspects of existence (Beatty et al., 2009). In other words, realist teachers believe in the reality of matter, as their position is material rather than spiritual (in contrast to idealist teachers). Hence, realist teachers advocate for a curriculum that draws on a range of subjects and activities, such as the Arts, English, mathematics, and science. This is because they view these subjects as helping students to “experience the physical and cultural structure of the world in which they live” (Light, 1998, p. 309). In this sense, “knowledge relates to all mankind” (Glenn et al., 1970, p. 30), reflecting the notion that interaction with reality produces valuable insights. Unlike idealist music teachers, who hold that beauty and

absolute truth derive from abstract musical concepts, realist music teachers assert that truth is discernible through the observation of natural law and the study of reality itself. This perspective highlights the importance of direct experience in learning (Beatty et al., 2009; Regelski, 2003). Thus, realist music teachers emphasise direct experience, such as singing a song rather than reading about it.

Pragmatism in Music Education

Pragmatism, which emerged from dissatisfaction with absolute-oriented philosophies such as idealism and realism, prioritises practical usefulness (Beatty et al., 2009). Pragmatist teachers stress the acquisition of skills and knowledge, with a focus on the learning process over the end product (Dewey, 1986). For these teachers, the “dedication to the process of uncovering the truth and determining reality” matters (Light, 1998, p. 311). In music education, pragmatist teachers emphasise teaching students how to sing or play musical instruments without focusing on a specific repertoire (e.g., Western classical music); they consider themselves as guides and facilitators.

Experimentalism or Instrumentalism in Music Education

Experimentalism was formerly referred to as instrumentalism (Light, 1998) and stems from the work of John Dewey (1986). It is closely related to pragmatism in that experimentalist teachers believe in learning by doing (or hands-on learning) and in the importance of direct experience. They want “[an] active school with active learners” (Light, 1998, p. 312). Experimentalist music teachers are responsible for planning and delivering learning activities toward meaningful learning goals, but they also feel that they need to maintain student interest so that students are led to knowledge that will help them deal with the problems of life (Light, 1998). In this sense, experimentalist music teachers perceive that music education benefits students in ways that are essentially unrelated to music—that is, the extrinsic values contribute to better health and to the development of good citizenship.

I will now discuss contemporary music education philosophies.

Contemporary Philosophies of Music Education

Mark (1982) and other scholars (Crooke, 2016; Stevens, 2002, n.d.;

Westerlund, 2008) elucidate two philosophical arguments, distinguishing between the utilitarian (or extrinsic) value and the aesthetic (or intrinsic) value of music education. However, these two philosophical categories may not encompass all philosophical frameworks within the field of music education. Despite the fact that the utilitarian rationale has historical roots (dating back to Plato's time, 428 BC to 327 BC), it is examined in this section with contemporary philosophies as it forms the foundation of Mark's (1982) and other scholar's (Crooke, 2016; Westerlund, 2008) binary categories of music education philosophy (utilitarian and aesthetic). For this reason, this inquiry explores the utilitarian music education philosophy, followed by the contemporary music education philosophies that have been used to inform pedagogical approaches:

- ✚ the aesthetic approach (Reimer, 1970, 1989a)
- ✚ the praxial approach (Elliott, 1995, 2012; Regelski, 2022)
- ✚ the experience-based approach (Reimer, 2003)
- ✚ the social justice approach (Jorgensen, 2021; Regelski, 2003, 2022)
- ✚ the open approach (Allsup, 2016)

Utilitarian Philosophy of Music Education

From Plato's time (428 BC to 327 BC) to the mid-20th century, a utilitarian rationale dominated the historical development of the philosophy of music education (Kanellopoulos, 2025; Mark, 1982, 2013; Temmerman, 1991). This utilitarian philosophical framework considers music as a means to achieve broad educational goals, such as providing a source of relaxation, inspiration, alleviation of stress and anxiety, cultural enrichment, acquiring social etiquette and fostering national pride (Banerjee et al., 2026; Crooke, 2016; Javaid et al., 2024; Rainbow, 1968; Temmerman, 1991). It highlights the importance of music in cultivating productivity, societal harmony, citizen development, and the transmission of knowledge between generations (Kanellopoulos, 2025). In addition, the utilitarian philosophy recognises the diverse values associated with music education because it reflects on its significance in fostering "social, physical, moral, and intellectual development" (McCarthy & Goble, 2005, p. 19). The utilitarian philosophical framework encompasses cognitive development,

psychological well-being (Crooke, 2016; Váradi, 2022; Varner, 2024), physical health (Mantie, 2022), and numerous aspects of attitude, behavioural, social and economic impact (Ewing, 2011; McCarthy & Goble, 2005). For instance, a utilitarian philosophical framework of music acts as social glue at family gatherings and community events, fostering connections and creating a sense of belonging by bringing people together (Fiol & Perman, 2024; Gonzalvo, 2023; Higgins, 2012). Moreover, music serves as a bridge between cultures as it transcends language barriers to communicate shared emotions and promote understanding and appreciation among people (Goncalves et al., 2024). In practice, utilitarian teachers use music as a means to develop students' academic and cognitive skills (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000; Philpott & Kubilius, 2015). In this sense, they use songs to help students memorise concepts or lists—that is, mnemonics (Jackson, 2009; Whitton et al., 2016)—and use music theory, such as note values and time signature, to promote “better mathematical outcomes in students” (Westerlund, 2008, p. 81).

Aesthetic Philosophy of Music Education

Beginning from the middle of the 1950s, dissatisfaction with the long-lasting utilitarian philosophy that had grounded the value of music education for centuries emerged among music education philosophers (McCarthy & Goble, 2005). These philosophers advocated for a new music education philosophy rooted in concepts derived from Western aesthetics aligned with the notion that “music has beauty and can develop a form of intelligence” (Barton & Hartwig, 2012, p. 3) that offers “meaningful, cognitive experiences unavailable in any other way” (Reimer, 1989b, pp. 28-29). This aesthetic approach “stems from an 18th century model of learning music in that it claims to acknowledge the aesthetic nature and value in music practices” (Barton & Hartwig, 2012, p. 4).

Bennett Reimer, a leading advocate for the aesthetic philosophy of music education, considered *Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE)* and warned that when music education is perceived solely as performance skill training, the profession becomes constrained by its overemphasis on “instructional methodologies” (McCarthy & Goble, 2005, p. 33). Reimer (1970) advocated two goals in music education:

- ✚ cultivating the musical abilities of naturally talented individuals; and
- ✚ developing aesthetic sensitivity to music for all, irrespective of their musical ability.

MEAE emphasises “the intrinsic value of music, which is music for its own sake” (Stevens, 2002, p. 202), focusing on aesthetic development, musical appreciation, and music as a form of emotional expression (Crooke, 2016; Regelski, 2022; Reimer, 2003). This aesthetic philosophy views music as a fundamental aspect of being human, serving as a language and a means of expressing emotions (Hargreaves et al., 2003; Pugh & Pugh, 1998). It rejects extra- or non-musical values to prioritise the aesthetic development of students (Mark, 1982; Reimer, 1970). Drawing on these aesthetic values, music teachers would encourage students to listen to musical sounds and focus on the expressive qualities of music, such as mood and tension (Bang, 2022). They also expose students to “great [Western] classics” (McCarthy & Goble, 2005, p. 21) to “develop musical literacy in a much broader sense” (Reimer, 1989a, p. 26).

Praxial Philosophy of Music Education

In the mid-1980s, a paradigm shift emerged within the philosophy of music education; scholars began to question the dominant aesthetic perspective of music education (McCarthy & Goble, 2005; Tóth, 2024). Drawing upon postmodern viewpoints, music education philosophers emphasised different forms of music, each possessing its own cultural specificity (Kwon, 2018). This paradigm challenged the limitations of an aesthetic rationale that overlooked music’s broader sociological, political, and cultural implications (Bowman, 1998; Elliott, 1991; Shepherd & Vulliamy, 1994). In response, scholars advocated for sociocultural conceptions of music, emphasising its contextual meanings and values (Elliott, 1989). Alperson (1994), Elliott (1995), and Small (1998) further developed praxial conceptions, stressing the importance of understanding music within specific cultural contexts as a form of action that reflects one’s relationship with others (Barba, 2017). According to Alperson (1994), embracing a praxial perspective in music education would require moving beyond philosophy and into anthropology. This would involve integrating the aesthetic

values of music with what were traditionally considered non-musical, utilitarian values encompassing moral, psychological, sociological, and political meanings inherent in musical transmission and expression. Moreover, Elliott (2012) contended that music extends beyond sonic works alone, suggesting that it is a multifaceted social praxis with values attributed based on its utilisation and perception in personal and social life. Praxial philosophy embraces students' development of musicianship by involving them in "performing, composing, listening, improvising, arranging, and conducting" (Brandman, 2016, p. 22). Within this philosophical framework, music education must expand beyond the Western art tradition to encompass all forms of musical practice (McCarthy & Goble, 2005; Regelski, 2003). Through active engagement in listening to and making music, students achieve "self-growth, self-knowledge, and enjoyment" (Ho, 2013, p. 81). In the music classroom, praxial teachers adopt active music-making (by playing instruments, singing and composing), peer collaboration and feedback (which is student-centred learning), and inclusive musical practices (Bang, 2022; Elliott, 1995).

Experience-based Philosophy of Music Education

The tension between the aesthetic and praxial rationales of music education continued to intensify during the 1990s (McCarthy & Goble, 2005). This escalated tension encouraged certain scholars to advocate for integrating both perspectives. For example, in the third edition of his book, *The Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, Reimer (2003) introduced the new concept of "synergistic, experienced-based philosophy" (p. 38). This approach seeks to explore music's diverse encounters and unique experiences. Reimer integrated perspectives such as "music as formed sounds, music as practice, music as an agent of social agency, music as providing utilitarian values" (Ho, 2013, p. 81) and music experience as multicultural interpretation into his new philosophy in order to respond to criticisms from David Elliot and other praxial philosophers who drew on the postmodern perspective. In Reimer's view, the aesthetic and praxial rationales are in a symbiotic, mutually complementary, relationship because each philosophy offers valid and powerful justification for including music in school curricula (Taylor, 2008). Music teachers drawing on this experience-based philosophy provide students with opportunities to interact

with music through singing, playing, listening, composing, improvising and meaning-making by embracing “multi-musical culture” (Kwon, 2018, p. 66). They value both the musical process and the outcome, integrate aesthetic and praxial perspectives to cultivate students’ emotions and musical understanding, and support diverse forms of musical experiences (Kwon, 2018; Smith, 2003).

Social Justice Philosophy of Music Education

While Reimer and certain aesthetic philosophers endeavoured to integrate their new perspective into music education, other scholars attempted to move beyond the ongoing debate between aesthetic and praxial philosophers. These scholars opted to interrogate challenges surrounding musical practices within specific contexts (McCarthy & Goble, 2005). For example, Regelski (2003, 2022) advocated for the application of critical theory and critical thinking to examine the purpose of music education. Sarath et al. (2016) mirrored Regelski’s (2022) view that music education should prioritise social justice over specific musical objectives (e.g., reading and writing music notation). Jorgensen (1997, 2003b) supported a dialectical and dialogical approach, aimed at acknowledging and resolving tensions. Ultimately, Jorgensen’s goal was to achieve reconciliation, tolerance and transformation in music education. In her book, *Values and Music Education*, Jorgensen (2021) emphasised the importance of considering alternative philosophical frameworks present in aesthetic and literature. She asserted that music entails dimensions beyond social and critical theory, including “physical, psychological, historical, anthropological, musical, educational, theological, and spiritual” aspects (Jorgensen, 2020, p. 130). Drawing on social justice values, music teachers encourage students to learn about the world through popular music by discussing its sociopolitical implications. For example, jazz and blues can facilitate discussions on topics such as poverty, racism and slavery (Philpott, 2022; Springer, 2016).

Open Philosophy of Music Education

In his book *Remixing the Classroom: Toward an Open Philosophy*, Allsup (2016) critiqued Elliott’s (1995) praxial philosophy by arguing that although Elliott discusses students’ adoption of musical values, the quality of learning

ultimately hinges on the teacher. Allsup (2016) advocated for a moral vision of music education that challenges traditional curricula and calls for transformation in contemporary human culture instead of replicating outdated practices (e.g., Western classical music). He also examined the Master-apprentice model in music education, illustrating music teachers as authoritative figures with power who deliver knowledge to students. Allsup intentionally set up a capitalised notion of Mastery to pursue musical accomplishment and excellence in a manner he perceived as “brutal and unnuanced dogma” (Stanley, 2019, p. 212). This explores what the experience of being *mastered* means for individuals who have specialised in music (or dance), and how one could imagine a tertiary arts education (including music) that rejects “inherent violence” in the teaching of music, such as teacher bullying (Allsup, 2017, p. 171). Allsup (2016, 2017) introduced the idea of laboratory and museum learning within music education, drawing on:

- ✚ Barthes’ (1989) notion of open and closed texts, which distinguishes between texts whose meanings are predetermined and controlled (therefore, closed) and those that invite multiple interpretations and co-construction of meaning by readers (therefore, open).
- ✚ Dewey’s (1986) notion of experiential education, which frames learning as an experimental process where students actively construct knowledge through direct experiences (Hess, 2017).

Museum learning echoes Aoki’s (1993) museum approach, where curiosities are displayed in a museum-like manner, inviting subjects to observe them from an objective distance. Closed form refers to an approach to music education (Marsh et al., 2017) characterised by a focus on reproducing musical techniques without much room for creativity and exploration. It is akin to learning in a closed environment, where students are confined to predetermined content without opportunities for personal expression. Open form, in contrast, refers to an approach that promotes creativity, exploration and personal expression in music learning (Allsup, 2016). Students are supported and urged to participate in music in different ways (e.g., improvisation, composition and experimentation), and teachers are encouraged to be facilitators and lifelong

learners in the music classroom (Concina, 2023; Stanley, 2019). Allsup (2016) suggested that open learning can sometimes be closed, and closed learning can sometimes be opened.

According to Allsup (2016), classrooms should be spaces where new knowledge is discovered, different possibilities to learn music are explored, and inefficiency is viewed as value-added. This moral vision aligns with the concept of the music teacher as a facilitator in awakening students' silenced voices (Allsup & Dalaqua, 2024; Marsh et al., 2017; Stanley, 2019). Rather than adhering to traditional pedagogies—teachers as authoritative figures who transmit knowledge to students—the music teacher adopts a role that empowers students to engage actively with music, fostering a sense of curiosity (Allsup, 2017). By encouraging students to explore diverse perspectives and approaches to music, the teacher opens up opportunities for students' personal growth and self-expression. This approach challenges oppressive and elitist practices that may be present in secondary and tertiary education settings (Allsup & Dalaqua, 2024; Stanley, 2019), where standardised curricula and assessments often prioritise conformity over individuality. Instead, the music teacher serves as a catalyst for change, advocating for inclusivity and diversity in music education (Marsh et al., 2017).

Some scholars have critiqued Allsup's (2016) open philosophy of music education, arguing that the title itself favours open forms of music education (as opposed to closed forms), such as informal pedagogy, where students collaboratively learn popular songs by listening to recordings (Green, 2006). This leads to a contradiction in his arguments about embracing both forms.

Historical Overview of Music Curriculum Development in Australia

This section provides an overview of the development of music curriculum in Australian and Victorian (primary and secondary) schools; it explores the shifts in curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and technological advancements that have shaped music teaching practices. This exploration encompasses various influences on the music curriculum since the mid-19th century, contextualised within broader changes in teaching approaches and

media formats shaped by technological developments in music education.

19th Century: Focus on Utilitarian Values in Australian Schools

The emphasis on the utilitarian value of music education in Australian schools dates back to the 1840s, when class singing was introduced into the school curriculum because of its utilitarian (or intrinsic) value—its humanising and civilising influence (Russell-Bowie, 2011; Stevens, n.d.). As a consequence of Australia's historical context as a British outpost in the 19th century, an effort was made to emulate British culture and social practices (Southcott & Joseph, 2007). For example, the 19th century witnessed the establishment of two distinct types of schools (private and national) to cater to children's educational needs in Australia. Private schools, often associated with education for the children of the military and governing elite as well as wealthier free settlers from Britain, adopted a curriculum that was focused on reading, speaking, and writing in English, alongside classical subjects like bookkeeping, geometry, trigonometry (Campbell & Proctor, 2014), and class singing for male students (Cameron, 1969; Stevens, 2002). Private schools gradually expanded their curriculum to include academic subjects more commonly associated with the education of middle- and upper-class students (Cameron, 1969; Sweetman et al., 1922).

In contrast, national schools accommodated working-class students, including those with convict parents with whom they lived. It is worth noting that national schools became state schools in 1873 (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Maddern, 1969; Sweetman et al., 1922). No state secondary school was established until 1905 and most students completed their education at the national schools at Year 8 (Maddern, 1969). The national schools focused on basic literacy and numeracy, alongside religious and moral education through class singing (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Wight & Bendigo, 2003). This emphasis came amidst concerns about the influx of migrants and convicts during the Gold Rush era (1851-1891) (Bebbington, 1997). Class singing was viewed as a way to soften students' minds, improve the school's moral tone, and make it appealing to parents (Stevens, 1981). Songs of this era were "intensely moralistic and didactic" (Stevens, 2002, p. 196). In essence, according to Wright (2016), class singing in the national schools aimed at preparing working-class students for futures that were typically in domestic and manual work. Wright's (2016)

argument aligned with that of Russell-Bowie (2011), who stated that music was taught to ensure that students (or future workers) remain “industrious, loyal, and religious” (p. 164). This suggests that class singing was used to maintain social dominance over the lower classes because convict and migrant populations were perceived to have attitudes that violated the ruling elite’s values and beliefs (Wight & Bendigo, 2003). This aligns with what Taylor (1919) noted in his book, *Scientific Management*, that “a high-priced man [or labourer] will do exactly as he is told tomorrow, from morning till night ... right straight through the day ... and no back talk” (p. 45).

For instance, a song titled ‘The Merry School Boy’, composed by Hugo Alpen (1886), included the following lyrics:

I am a merry school-boy;
And practice well this rule;
To work all day;
And then enjoy my freedom after school;
I always learn my lessons;
And strive to do them well;
And though I’m glad when playtime comes;
I love to hear the bell. (p. 16)



Image 1. *The Merry School Boy* (Alpen, 1886)

Music Education in Victorian Schools

In 1851, the state of Victoria became an independent colony and inherited a dual education system from New South Wales (NSW). This comprised the denominational school board (which supported church-funded religious schools) and the national school board (which supported government-funded secular schools) (Best, 2020; Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Maddern, 1969). In 1857, the dual education boards agreed on a system in which specialist singing teachers visited both private and national schools to offer lessons (Russell-Bowie, 2011; Stevens, n.d.). However, in 1862, the Victorian Parliament enacted the *Common Schools Act*, thereby abolishing the dual education system and establishing a single Board of Education. The Board of Education continued to allocate funds to religious schools, resulting in the *Royal Commission* in 1866 and the *Education Act (Vic)* in 1872 (National Museum of Australia, 2020). Throughout its term from 1862 to 1872, the Board of Education dismissed visiting specialist singing teachers due to insufficient funding. This decision sparked objections from parents who were opposed to any withdrawal of musical instruction. Consequently, singing lessons were resumed through an arrangement in which parents paid additional fees for them in national schools. This relegated music to the status of an extracurricular subject in school education (Ferris, 1993; Stevens, n.d.).

In 1872, the enactment of the *Education Act (Vic)* resulted in the dismissal of the denominational school board (Best, 2020) and led to the independent (rather than state) administration of private schools (Stevens, 2002). This legislation made Victoria the first Australian colony to introduce “free, secular and compulsory education” (National Museum of Australia, 2020, para. 2) for students between the ages of six and 14 years (Maddern, 1969; Meadmore, 2001; Sweetman et al., 1922).

In 1873, Victoria took on the significant responsibility of providing schools and teachers to educate every Victorian child. Since then, the Victorian Education Department has been responsible for overseeing Victorian state education, and accountable to the Victorian people through Parliament (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Maddern, 1969). This transition marked the shift from national schools to state schools. Through the *Education Act (Vic)*, music (class singing) was mandated as one of the core curriculum subjects, taught by

visiting singing teachers and supervised by a music inspector (Russell-Bowie, 2011). Consequently, parents no longer needed to pay for singing lessons.

In 1874, under the Department of Public Instruction, class singing was taught by either visiting singing specialist teachers or generalist teachers who were licenced to teach singing and compensated with an extra £10 per annum for providing music instruction (Stevens, 2002).

In the 1880s, music also became an extra-curricular activity because of the formation of state school drum and fife bands. Funds were raised to purchase musical instruments for band use (Stevens, 2002; Sweetman et al., 1922). Also, there was an acknowledgment of the intellectual progress of music notation study, as it stimulated “cognitive skills through the study of music theory and the development of music literacy” (Stevens, 2002, p. 198).

In 1890, the economic depression prompted the Victorian state government to dismiss visiting singing teachers, eliminate music positions from state schools and suspend all additional payments to classroom teachers (or generalists) with a licence to teach singing. As a result, classroom teachers without a music instruction licence were assigned the responsibility of providing singing in class (Stevens, n.d.). The removal of visiting singing teachers from state schools created a disparity in the competence of music teachers delivering the music curriculum, leading to differences between state and private schools. State schools had access to a few musical instruments due to budgetary restrictions, while private schools had access to pianos and orchestral instruments (e.g., violins and flutes for solo or group performances) (Stevens, 2002). In this context, music education was associated with playing instruments, which became an artistic endeavour and social achievement for children from privileged and advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Green, 1999).

Early to Mid-20th Century: Focus on Aesthetic Values

From 1901, the state of Victoria began the process of establishing the state system of secondary education by incorporating provisions outlined in the *Education Act (Vic) of 1872* (Sweetman et al., 1922). However, it was not until 1905 that the first state secondary schools for boys and girls were established: the Melbourne Continuation School (now Melbourne High School) and Melbourne Girls' High School.

The implementation of music education in state secondary schools began in 1923 with the appointment of Alfred B. Lane as the first music supervisor in Victoria (Cameron, 1969; Stevens, n.d.). Under his direction, music specialists were employed to teach in state primary and secondary schools (Stevens, n.d.). Music directors were also employed at private schools (e.g., Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar).

In 1925, instrumental music teaching and ensemble or group performance expanded in Victorian state schools due to a generous bequest from William Gillies. He left approximately £10,000 in trust for the promotion of orchestral and band music in state schools ("Music and Reading", 1925), enabling the purchase of musical instruments for Victorian state (primary and secondary) schools. This funding also enabled the formation of the State Schools Orchestra Association in 1939 (De Korte, 2018; Stevens, n.d.), empowering students' cultural development through ensemble playing and helping them acquire musical skills such as reading and writing music notation and learning to play a musical instrument (Stevens, 2002). In addition, affordable classroom instruments such as tuned and untuned percussion instruments and recorders were available to state secondary schools. While the formation of school bands and orchestras was progressing in state schools, private schools (that had since evolved into grammar schools or colleges) continued to offer instrumental music lessons for both solo and group performances, as well as choral singing (De Korte, 2018). This strong emphasis on instrumental music in private schools culminated in a strong culture of school orchestras and bands performing Western classical music (Stevens, n.d.).

During the 1930s, the gramophone was introduced into state school music classes, while the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) broadcast music programs that incorporated elements of music appreciation (Russell-Bowie, 2011). From 1938 to the 1950s, the ABC broadcast *Dalcroze Eurhythmics*, which is an approach that fosters music appreciation and aural training using the body as the key instrument (Dalcroze Australia, 2022), to inspire classroom teachers to integrate body movement into their teaching practices (Russell-Bowie, 2011). This incorporation of listening into the music curriculum not only facilitated cultural education but also introduced working-class children to 'high culture' through exposure to Western classical music

(Stevens, 2002). Furthermore, classroom music played an essential role in the cultural reproduction of European connections as students were exposed to “folk songs from other lands” and listened to “gramophone programs featuring nationalistic music composed by Edvard Grieg and Antonin Dvorak”, as well as “[Western] classical masterpieces of Hayden, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert” (Stevens, 2002, p. 199). In addition, music served as a means for students to obtain “knowledge of the geography” (Stevens, 2002, p. 199) and culture of other nations (as they listened to Western classical pieces composed by European composers), while also providing teachers with opportunities to integrate “music listening and appreciation into the curriculum” (Russell-Bowie, 2011, p. 164).

In the 1950s, the Orff Schulwerk method began to influence music education in Australia. This method places a strong focus on “singing, body percussion, and playing on a variety of both tuned and untuned percussion instruments [such as xylophone, tambourine, triangle, and claves]” (Australian National Council of Orff Schulwerk, 2023, para. 1). Body movement, however, was limited to young children in primary schools or identified as part of the physical education curriculum in secondary schools. This is due to music being positioned as a formal subject of study in the 1950s, with students singing and performing songs (Russell-Bowie, 2011).

In the late 1960s, Australia adopted the creative music approach from Britain. This approach emphasised non-technical forms of musical creativity and performance by incorporating graphic notation (New South Wales Government Department of Education, n.d) (see Image 2 below), traditional sound sources, and unconventional techniques with conventional instruments (Stevens, n.d.).

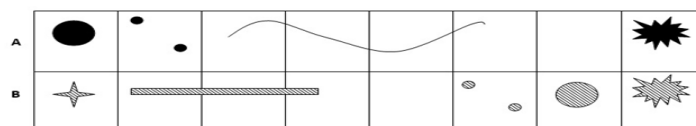


Image 2. Graphic Notation (NSW Department of Education, n.d.)

In 1971, the Kodály method was introduced in Australia, with the Kodály Music Education Institute of Australia established in 1973 (Kodály music education institute of Australia, n.d). This method emphasises integrating

rhythmic movement such as walking, running and clapping with singing and listening to folk songs (Kodály music education institute of Australia, n.d; Russell-Bowie, 2011). It also promotes musical literacy by introducing scale degrees and employing solfege hand signs to foster the development of musical skills (Kodály music education institute of Australia, n.d; Russell-Bowie, 2011). To the present day, the Kodály method has been embraced by classroom music teachers in Australia for its effectiveness in nurturing musical literacy and cultivating a passion for music among students.

Late 20th and 21st Century: Dynamics of Utilitarian and Aesthetic Values

During the 1970s, the Australian education system underwent a shift from a centralised directorate to decentralisation down to the school level. This shift was especially pronounced following the electoral victory of Gough Whitlam's Labor Party in the federal election of 1972. This new government committed to an unparalleled influx of resources for innovative learning activities in schools and to improving creative, student-centred education policies and practices (Russell-Bowie, 2009). This approach sought to empower schools by granting them more control over administrative processes, resource allocation and curriculum development (Russell-Bowie, 2011). In 1977, a national research project titled 'Education and the Arts' was conducted by the School Commission and Australia Council (SCAC) to examine the status of Australian arts education. The findings of the study revealed that although the Arts, defined as "visual arts, craft, music, drama, dance, film, television, radio, and creative writing" (Russell-Bowie, 2011, p. 166), yet a limited number of students were engaged and participated in arts experiences (Russell-Bowie, 2011). In response, the project report recommended the development of national policies and strategies for school programs in arts education to ensure that every student could "actively engage in quality arts experiences throughout their schooling, at least until mid-secondary school" (Russell-Bowie, 2011, p. 166). In addition to developing national policies and strategies for arts education in Australia (including music), there was a significant drive to incorporate Aboriginal and multicultural artworks and culture into school arts curricula. This initiative aimed to provide students with more diverse and inclusive arts

experiences in school (Russell-Bowie, 2009). The impetus for this initiative came from a significant influx into Australia of refugees and immigrants from various parts of the world, bringing their cultural backgrounds and musical traditions into the music classroom (Cain, 2015).

Before World War II, Australia maintained a predominantly monocultural, inward-looking, and conservative stance in relation to national culture (Halafoff, 2006; Smith & Phillips, 2001). This ethos was reinforced by the *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)*, also known as the ‘White Australia Policy’, which imposed strict limitations on immigration from non-British countries (National Archives of Australia, n.d.). Following World War II, there was a gradual relaxation of the *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)*, allowing for the admission of refugees and immigrants from diverse backgrounds in regulated numbers (National Museum of Australia, n.d.). This shift led to a significant influx of refugees and immigrants to Australia, fostering the emergence of multiculturalism. The Whitlam government played a pivotal role by abolishing the *Immigration Restriction Act (1901)* entirely in the 1970s and enacting the *Racial Discrimination Act* in 1975 (Cain, 2015). The *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* influenced the inclusion of multicultural and Aboriginal culture into school curricula, thereby providing students with a more diverse and inclusive arts experience. Furthermore, teaching approaches evolved with the inclusion of popular music in Australian music curricula during the 1970s (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000). This followed Springer’s (2016) definition of popular music, in the “broader sense, entailing all vernacular modes of music-making under the label of popular music, such as rock, country, jazz, folk, and rhythm and blues (R&B)” (p. 404). This led to “a closer alignment of music education with broad goals of diverse multiculturalism, and the meaningful integration of music technology into instruction” (Barrett, 2007, p. 152).

During the 1980s and 1990s, multiple national and state committees were formed to oversee and promote the implementation of 25 recommendations emanating from the ‘Education and the Arts’ research project (1977) (Russell-Bowie, 2011). These initiatives included refurbishing buildings to provide suitable music facilities, providing professional development for music teachers, and conducting thorough reviews of each state’s music curriculum and practices (Russell-Bowie, 2011). Moreover, the incorporation of

computers into classrooms and libraries, along with the influx of various technologies (e.g., amplification systems and musical instruments like electric guitars and drum machines) and digital technologies (e.g., synthesisers, samplers and sequencers), impacted music education in schools across the country (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000; Wise et al., 2011). As a result of integrating new technologies, the nature of musical composition, reproduction, participation, and the overall musical experience underwent significant transformations in music classrooms (Bauer, 2020; Hargreaves et al., 2003). This prompted the emergence and implementation of innovative music teaching and learning approaches aligned with the praxial philosophy of music education. These technology-based teaching and learning approaches harness new technology to cultivate interactive music learning experiences for both teachers and students. Students were introduced to:

- ✚ a form of musical creativity and performance (Stevens, 2002) that requires less technical skill, relying instead on graphic notation, which incorporates a variety of visual elements, symbols, words, and notes to guide performers (New South Wales Government Department of Education, n.d); and
- ✚ use of traditional instruments in experimental ways, such as using a violin bow to strike the piano strings inside the instrument; this innovative approach challenges the conventional aesthetic education model (McCarthy & Goble, 2003).

Moreover, music teachers began integrating electronic and digital sound-reproduction devices, such as digital recorders, into their teaching practices to facilitate instruction in composition, music notation, and aural training. This changing practice stemmed from the recognition that such technology not only empowers students' musical experiences without requiring prior musical knowledge (in line with the praxial philosophy of music education) but also assists students in their understanding of music theory and development of aural skills, which are related to the aesthetic philosophy (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000; Wise, 2016). In previous periods of Australian music education, students' experience of composition varied widely, ranging from virtually non-existent to the use of pen-and-paper approaches combined with advanced

instrumental skills (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000). The elitist pen-and-paper approach vanished with the advent of digital technology, and sound manipulation has since become increasingly “user-friendly and accessible” (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000, p. 28). As a consequence, composition no longer requires musical literacy or advanced performance skills, all of which were previously viewed as long-term goals. Despite the incorporation of technology to improve students' musical experiences without their prior musical knowledge, controversy remains over whether technology responds to musical needs or whether music adjusts and utilises available technology as it becomes accessible (Cope, 1998). To mitigate the risk that technology may overshadow its significance in music, the New South Wales Board of Studies (2000) recommended that the focus of study be on the effects of technology on music, rather than solely on the technology itself.

In 1985, the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communication and the Arts References Committee (SERCARC, 1985) conducted research into the state of arts education (including music) across Australia to examine procedures, policies, and programs in all schools. The study findings indicated that arts education in schools had remained unchanged since the release of the 1977 ‘Education and the Arts’ project report, with the Arts continuing to be neglected. While the report highlighted the importance of the Arts in the lives of students and presented 25 policy recommendations, not enough funds were allocated to implement these recommendations (Russell-Bowie, 2011). Escalating the situation, the federal government published *Strengthening Australia's Schools* in 1988 (Dawkins, 1988). This concentrated on literacy, numeracy, science and technology education as important for building Australian students' basic skills while excluding the Arts (including music) (Russell-Bowie, 2012). This report also advocated for the establishment of a national curriculum (Dawkins, 1988), leading to the formulation of national goals for schools and the development of a national standards framework in the early 1990s (Russell-Bowie, 2011). The Arts, including music, were omitted from the national curriculum structure. However, the National Association of Arts Educators emphasised the importance of the Arts in school education, resulting in music, along with other arts strands, being integrated into a different primary learning area of the Arts (art, dance, drama, media and visual communication),

in accordance with the utilitarian value of music education (Russell-Bowie, 2011).

Neoliberal Influences on Music Education

Neoliberalism and educational reforms are based on the belief that “individual participation in market practices is vital to personal well-being” (Horsley, 2015, p. 62), self-interest and the pursuit of profit (Kanu & Glor, 2006). In education, this is closely associated with parents' autonomy in making educational decisions about whether to enrol their children in private or state systems, guided by what they perceive as best for them (Horsley, 2015). This view aligns with Lyotard's (1984) perspective, wherein knowledge is seen as a commodity (Kauppinen, 2014), “distinct from the knower, and as with the possession of other commodities, serving as a measure of wealth” (Philpott, 2017, p. 82). Western industrialised societies now live in knowledge economies that are fuelled by “ingenuity [innovation], creativity, inventiveness, and capacity to cope with rapid change” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 102). In this sense, schools in knowledge societies are required to prepare employees for the 21st century (Hargreaves, 2003; Kanu & Glor, 2006), characterised by being “literate, numerate, flexible, creative, and Information Technology (IT) savvy, ready to compete in the global knowledge economy” (Savage, 2017, p. 59).

One of the most significant changes to education occurred in the 1990s with the “reshaping of government/state schools in line with market-based practices”, which is the core tenet of neoliberal governance (Savage, 2017, p. 153). Australia, as an industrialised Western nation, moved to reform its “education system in the hopes of keeping employment high through the production of individuals who would cater to the newly dubbed global knowledge economy” (Horsley, 2015, p. 66). This reform prompted individual schools to focus on demonstrating students' literacy and numeracy skills through participation in national and international standardised assessments, such as the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), beginning in 2008, and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), beginning in 2000. This shift in focus resulted in the marginalisation of music in Australian school education, with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy over music (Aróstegui, 2016; Ewing, 2013, 2020; Jeanneret &

Wilson, 2016; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Savage, 2017; Spruce, 2024). According to Apple (2004), music's marginalisation occurred because the Arts, including music, and the humanities are considered less amenable, suggesting they are less likely to be testable, assessable and graded. Consequently, several music education researchers (Killian & Wayman, 2015; Philpott & Kubilius, 2015) have contended that music should be included in school education and be highly regarded for its utilitarian or extrinsic value to students over its aesthetic or intrinsic value. Killian and Wayman (2015) and Philpott and Kubilius (2015) have also argued that music is a valuable and useful teaching tool; not only can it aid memorisation and special skills and increase attention spans, but it can also improve students' literacy and numeracy scores on tests such as NAPLAN and PISA (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012). The justification for including music in school education lies in its benefits, which directly correlate with literacy and numeracy. Further, the inclusion of music in school education has been justified for its therapeutic qualities, emotional support, and civilising effect on students, as it helps make them better-rounded individuals (Philpott & Kubilius, 2015). These justifications advocate for the utilitarian or extrinsic value of music education, emphasising its role in fostering development in engineering, mathematics, and science, which are highly valued by society.

Australian and Victorian Music Curriculum in the 21st Century

In 2005, the *National Review of School Music Education* highlighted the inadequate access to quality music education for many Australian students, revealing a lack of appreciation for music in their communities. This review prompted several policy recommendations (Russell-Bowie, 2011) aimed at addressing these issues:

- ✚ promoting the significance of school music education;
- ✚ increasing the deployment of specialist music teachers and inventing relevant training programs; and
- ✚ offering in-service training and support for both classroom and specialist music teachers.

Furthermore, this national review reflected concerns that had persisted over the previous three decades, dating back to the 1977 'Education and the Arts'

project. These concerns included insufficient resources, time constraints, marginalisation of music education, and a decline in the number of music specialists in schools (Russell-Bowie, 2011).

In 2008, the Australian Labor government established a National Curriculum Board to develop a comprehensive national curriculum to set “core content and standards for students in all Australian schools from Kindergarten to Year 12” (Russell-Bowie, 2011, p. 168). Once again, the Arts, including music, were excluded from the core subjects (e.g., English, mathematics, science and history) in the initial charter, then re-included in the national curriculum in 2011 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011).

In 2013, the federal government introduced the *Students First* policy, with the intention of collaborating with all educational stakeholders (i.e., states, territories, non-government school authorities, school leaders, teachers, and families or caregivers) to prioritise the following four key policy areas: developing a robust national curriculum, improving teaching quality, granting principals and teachers greater autonomy, and involving parents and the wider community in school governance (Parliament of Australia, 2013). Since the implementation of the *Students First* policy, the Australian national curriculum has been integrated into the Victorian curriculum (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-c). When discussing the evolution of the Victorian curriculum, it is essential to note the progression through several key frameworks, which include:

- ✚ Curriculum and Standard Framework (CSF), used from 1995 to 2000.
- ✚ Curriculum and Standards Framework II (CSF II), implemented between 2000 and 2005.
- ✚ Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), adopted from 2006 to 2012.
- ✚ Australian Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS), covering the period from 2013 to 2016.
- ✚ Victorian Curriculum F-10 (version 1.0), designed in 2015 and implemented in 2017, with version 2.0 rolling out in 2024-2026.

Transitioning from these curriculum frameworks, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 integrates the Australian national curriculum while reflecting Victorian standards and priorities (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-c) in each curriculum area. A distinction between the current curriculum framework and its predecessor (AusVELS) lies in how they approach integrating the national curriculum. Whilst AusVELS incorporated the national curriculum solely into English, mathematics, history and science, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 extends this integration across all curriculum areas. This development emphasises the ongoing commitment to aligning Victorian education standards with national benchmarks while catering to the state's unique needs and priorities. Within this current curriculum framework, the music curriculum aims to achieve the following objectives, drawing on utilitarian, aesthetic, and praxial views of music education (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-a):

- ✚ cultivate confidence in students to explore their creativity, innovation, thoughtfulness, skilfulness, and musical knowledge;
- ✚ develop skills in listening, improvising, composing, interpreting, performing and responding to music with purpose and intention;
- ✚ foster appreciation and respect for the diversity of music and musical practices found across global communities, cultures, and traditions; and
- ✚ promote understanding of music as an aural art form, its relationship with other art forms, and its impact on cultures and societies.

In 2024, the Victorian state government recognised the multifaceted benefits of music education, acknowledging its role not only in enhancing academic achievement but also in boosting confidence and fostering overall well-being among students, thereby aligning with a utilitarian rationale (Department of Education and Training, 2024). This recognition is reflected in the allocation of funding totalling over \$3.5 million in the 2021-2022 Victorian Budget, supplemented by an ongoing commitment of \$1.062 million in 2024-2025, dedicated to sustaining and strengthening the Music in Schools (MiS) program. Its overarching goal is to build the capacity necessary for the effective implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10: The Arts, with a particular

focus on music, including assessment and reporting practices (Department of Education and Training, 2024).

Redefining Music Curriculum

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), a statutory body under the Victoria state government, is responsible for directing curriculum and assessment initiatives for Victorian F-10 students (Arc, n.d.; Crawford, 2017). Under its authority, all Victorian schools must develop teaching and learning programs aligned with the Victorian curriculum. This requirement extends to both Victorian state and private schools, while granting them the autonomy to build programs tailored to their specific contexts and needs (Catholic Education Melbourne, n.d; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2023). Hence, teachers and principals play crucial roles in developing, delivering, reviewing, and redesigning school curricula (Alsubaie, 2016; Barrett, 2007). Recognising the pivotal role of teachers in these processes, the subsequent sections explore the evolving understanding of the music curriculum, teachers' approaches to curriculum planning, and their impact.

Shifting Music Curriculum

The interpretation of curriculum as a written document, outlining what teachers will teach and what students will learn and understand (such as in national, school, or subject curriculum), is prevalent in government policies, media, and political discussions (Crooke, 2016). In the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (version 2.0), the Arts encompasses Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-a). According to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (n.d.-b), music is organised into four interdependent strands, each focusing on both making and responding:

- ✚ **Exploring:** students (as listeners, composers, and performers) explore “the context and roles of music in the lives of individuals and groups across cultures, times, places and communities, and how music communicates cultural and aesthetic knowledge, purpose, meaning and

emotion". Students are required to "respond using musical practices and forms, imagery, sounds, movement, language, and digital tools to respond to stimuli" (e.g., music they have listened to, observations, feelings, experiences, and research) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-b, para. 2).

- 🌈 **Developing practices:** students develop practices and skills for "listening to, composing, performing and responding to music by developing knowledge and understanding through play, imagination, experimentation, creative and critical thinking and practice". Students are required to "use their voices, instruments, safe practice principles and guidelines, and materials" (e.g., scores and sheet music, amplification equipment and digital tools) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-b, para. 3).
- 🌈 **Creating:** students (as artists and audiences) apply "music-specific or multi-arts creative processes to compose, interpret music for performances, and reflect on their work through observation, using aural skills, analysis, reflection and evaluation". Students also manipulate elements of music to "compose through songwriting and improvisation, and to interpret music composed by others" (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-b, para. 4).
- 🌈 **Presenting:** students "perform their compositions and interpretations of music composed by others in informal and formal settings in physical or virtual spaces". Students also "plan, select, design, and rehearse their presentations and performances, using technical skills and manipulating elements of music to engage audiences and communicate their intentions" (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-b, para. 5).

These four strands highlight the importance deciding what to teach, which can affect the "value attributed to music and to music education" (Cooke & Spruce, 2016, p. 64). This perspective is compatible with Philpott's (2022) notion of *curriculum as content*. This curricular notion revolves around a fundamental question posed by Pinar (2019): Of all that can be taught, what knowledge is of most worth? In the context of the music curriculum, content focused on classical music appreciation, music theory study (e.g., analysing harmony and melody),

and traditional song singing, often delivered through didactic pedagogy, represents reified forms of curriculum (Philpott, 2022). Such curriculum reification not only specifies the knowledge and skills to be acquired but also forms “a strong foundation for a discourse of power in music education, perpetuating colonialism and other forms of injustice” (Philpott, 2022, p. 4). This argument aligns closely with the historical overview of the development of music curriculum discussed in previous sections, highlighting the inherently political nature of the music curriculum and the exclusionary aspects of music education.

Some scholars, diverging from the conventional understanding of music curriculum as a written document and content, began to recognise it within a broader context, in line with praxial and open philosophy of music education (Allsup, 2016; Elliott, 1995). This expanded perspective views the music curriculum not as a static document solely providing instruction, but as a dynamic process that evolves from interactions and relationships among teachers, students, and what there is to be learned (Cooke & Spruce, 2016). In essence, the Victorian music curriculum encompasses guiding students, using suitable and relevant pedagogical approaches, to explore and collaboratively create lived musical experiences, which Philpott (2022) labelled *curriculum as process*. This viewpoint resonates with Cornbleth’s (2013) definition of the music curriculum as an ongoing social process comprised of the “day to day interactions of students, teachers, knowledge, and milieu [culture]” (p. 89). This broader view of the music curriculum, which serves as a continuously evolving framework to foster student interactions and the emergence of their own knowledge and meanings, represents a significant shift from the traditional conceptualisation of the curriculum (Cooke & Spruce, 2016).

Philpott’s (2022) *curriculum as process* reflects Allsup’s (2016) open philosophy of music education, which advocates for classrooms as spaces where knowledge is actively sought and explored. In this approach, music teachers act as facilitators, encouraging students to actively participate and fostering students’ individual voices in the music classroom. They empower students to engage with music from diverse perspectives and to challenge oppressive or elitist practices (such as those associated with Western classical

music) that may exist in secondary school settings.

Music Teachers' Curriculum Planning Approaches

In their report on the *Australian National Review of School Music Education*, Pascoe et al. (2005) highlighted classroom music teachers' diverse perspectives on the music curriculum, noting that some school music programs are disconnected from students' interests and musical experiences. Pascoe et al. (2005) recommended a shift away from traditional, teacher-centred approaches towards a more personalised approach that affirms students' interests and sociocultural backgrounds. Numerous scholars (Barrett, 2005; Barton & Riddle, 2022; Crawford, 2020; Cremades-Andreu & Lage-Gómez, 2024; Fuller, 2022; Green, 2005, 2006; Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; Massy & Sembiante, 2023; McPhail, 2013; Ng, 2018; Philpott, 2022; Springer, 2016; Triantafyllaki, 2024; Walter, 2018; and Wise et al., 2011) have echoed Pascoe et al.'s (2005) recommendations. They have emphasised the need for music teachers to deliver curricula in ways that create meaningful musical experiences and foster student engagement in school music programs. Hargreaves (2003) reiterated these sentiments, stressing the social and cultural context in which students' stylistic awareness must be considered when explaining students' developing sensitivity to musical styles and preferences. In consequence, music teachers need to be able to “negotiate the curriculum, [which] means [teachers] deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational program so that they will have a commitment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes” (Boomer, 1992, p. 13). Teachers need to accommodate the diverse interests, skills, and levels of engagement (Boomer, 1992), while also promoting students' responsibility, autonomy and agency in their classrooms (Bron et al., 2016). This acknowledges that students bring a range of interests, skills, and levels of engagement to the classroom (Aoki, 2004b; Bernstein, 2000). For instance, in the music practice strand of the Victorian music curriculum—where students are encouraged to develop musical practices and skills for listening to, composing, performing and responding to music by “developing knowledge and understanding through play, imagination, experimentation, creative and critical thinking and practice” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-b, para. 3)—teachers encourage

students to voice their preferences for the types of music they want to engage with and participate in, whether it is popular, classical, or cultural music. Subsequently, they offer opportunities for students to utilise traditional music notation or graphic notation (see Image 2 presented earlier in this chapter). This aligns with Aoki's (2004a) notion of *curriculum-as-lived-experiences*, that "if there are 25 students in the class, there are apt to be 25 lived curricula" (pp. 296-297).

Furthermore, Barrett (2005) contended that music teachers' approaches to curriculum planning can change students' musical experiences. This view draws upon Pinar's (2019) concept of curriculum, which occurs through a complicated conversation—situated in "a space and time where teachers and students meet to bring local and global dialogues, influences, stories, histories, and cultures" (Süssekind & Nascimento, 2019, p. 51)—that has often silenced issues such as "racism, misogyny and economic inequality, within and across the school subject and academic disciplines" (Pinar, 2019, p. 15).

Barrett's (2005) argument resonates with Freire's (2005) notion of critical pedagogy, which emphasises the importance of educators providing a curriculum that supports students and believing in their capacity to engage in critical thinking and expression (Kanellopoulos et al., 2016). Examined through a Freirean lens (Freire, 2005), education must not only provide literacy skills to marginalised communities as a basic societal need and prerequisite for social mobility, but also play an essential role in fostering critical reflection on individuals' circumstances and in questioning the assumptions embedded in their world or reality (Wright, 2013). In this sense, achieving social justice in music education necessitates the implementation of critical pedagogy, which empowers both teachers and students to "reclaim ownership over direction of their musical lives" (Woodford, 2012, p. 98) by helping them see and hear the world with critical eyes and ears. This critical-reflection approach is diametrically opposed to one where teachers transmit their knowledge and skills to students as passive receivers (Freire, 2018). It aligns with Toulmin's (1982) notion of the *death of the spectator*, which describes a shift in the role of students from passive observers or receivers of knowledge to active participants in the learning process. In the past, students were often viewed as receivers of the

content teachers conveyed and were only active in the sense of staying on track with the curriculum. However, this perspective shifted toward a postmodern orientation (Doll Jr., 1993) that encouraged students to engage actively in their learning and contribute their perspectives and interpretations, rather than passively consume knowledge. This shift reflects a broader evolution in educational philosophy towards learner-centred approaches that prioritise student agency and involvement in their own learning journey. In this context, music teachers were required to consider “whose music, cultural hierarchies and underpinning ideologies in music education were the foundation of choices being made within the curriculum?” (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016, p. 214). This aligns with praxial and open philosophies of music education. Jeanneret and Wilson (2016) argued that music teachers’ choices regarding curriculum content and pedagogical approaches could either further perpetuate and reify, or mitigate inequality of opportunity for students based on their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Apple, 2019). This critical position mirrors Giroux’s (1985, 2024a) idea of *teachers as transformative intellectuals*, which emphasises the responsibility of (music) teachers to critically reflect on the content they teach, the teaching strategies they employ in delivering the curriculum, and the goals they set for students. It also resonates with Said’s (1994) portrayal of *intellectuals as exiles and amateurs*, whose role is to speak the truth to power, to be “sceptical of mainstream political and social trends”, and address “moral issues at the heart of the most technical and professional activity” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 103). Both concepts require careful consideration and connection to the broader critical shift in music education. Therefore, music teachers need to ask themselves whether the various areas of the music curriculum they deliver in the classroom reflect their own interests or those of the social, cultural and political elite, or whether they genuinely align with the interests and needs of their students (McPhail, 2013).

Perspectives on Music Curriculum

Music education scholars (Ho, 2022; McPhail, 2013; Pascoe et al., 2005; Shepherd & Vulliamy, 1994) have highlighted the various views among music teachers regarding the purpose of music education. Contrasting views advocate that the purpose of music education is to teach musical literacy and

performance skills to expand students' musical knowledge, which aligns with the aesthetic or intrinsic value of music education. This view may stem from music teachers' own learning experiences during primary, secondary, or higher education, as they were likely taught in this manner (Fuller, 2022; Kastner, 2020; Oleson & Hora, 2014). Music education has also been viewed as a means of achieving liberation from one social group's dominance over another because it has potential to "bring forth and/or develop capabilities, abilities and aptitudes related to a desire for social justice that already potentially exist" (Folkestad, 2006, p. 139). Bernstein (2000) discussed how students' rights of participation and inclusion are affected by the unequal distribution of:

- ✚ image (whose musical image does the school curriculum predominantly reflect?)
- ✚ knowledge (access to knowledge that provides students with advantages or disadvantages in accessing school music)
- ✚ possibilities/opportunities (how students perceive music in the school context)
- ✚ resources (access to instruments, extra tuition, computers, and other resources)

Aligned with the idea of music as a means of achieving liberation, Allsup and Dalaqua (2024), Jorgensen (2020), and McPhail (2013) revealed that certain pedagogies embrace the notion of music education as a means of liberation, with this belief encouraging students to listen to and study Western classical music and its theoretical aspects. However, listening to Western classical music and learning music theory are often available only in households that have the privilege of fostering musical engagement from a young age. While schools can offer this exposure to some extent, students from more privileged backgrounds often have a head start in their musical development.

Green (1999) supported this implication by arguing that students' delineated musical meaning, which encapsulates the different ways individuals understand and interpret music, can challenge teachers when introducing new practice such as music theory or Western classical music. Consequently, it suggests the necessity of providing students with opportunities to be engaged

with Western classical music and learn musical literacy within schools, because students' delineated musical meaning is difficult to change once formed (Wright, 2013). Green's (1999) argument resonates with Apple's (2019) and Bourdieu's (1989) explanations, stressing the crucial role of education in cultural reproduction. Specifically, Apple (2019) asserted that education reproduces inequality as cultural capital is distributed unequally across society and primarily based on the division of labour and power within that society, and that the "stratification of knowledge ... involves the stratification of people" (p. 37).

Music Education, Cultural Capital, and Cultural Reproduction

The phenomenon of cultural reproduction is evident in the way playing musical instruments became associated with prestigious artistic endeavour and with markers of social accomplishment, especially among students from upper- and middle-class backgrounds (as discussed in the previous section on 19th-century curriculum development). Learning musical literacy and acquiring advanced performance techniques and skills as a form of cultural capital have been prevalent areas of focus in Australian school music education. In addition, students who perceive themselves as elite, based on factors such as their "background, family cultural habits, or private music tuition" (Wright, 2015, p. 343)—that is, viewing themselves as special knowers with or capable of acquiring and developing the "special knowledge necessary to succeed in music" (Wright, 2015, p. 343)—are positioned in a higher social position than their less-fortunate peers because they possess more cultural capital. Wright (2015) further elaborated on this point, stating that parents purposefully engage in "harvesting cultural resources and qualifications such as music, ballet, and athletic examinations and certificates for their children" (p. 342) to ensure that they have accumulated cultural capital to win the education race.

In the current system, education is viewed as a commodity, leading parents to navigate a competitive environment and position their children for the best life outcomes. This entails striving for higher scores in literacy and numeracy, assessed through standardised tests such as the NAPLAN and the PISA (Finley, 2000; West, 2012), which serve as entry points to prestigious university programs. Music, however, occupies a distinct position; it is perceived as an enhancer of prestige (aligning with the utilitarian value). The unequally

distributed cultural capital further entrenches and reifies existing disadvantages and inequality of opportunity in education. Western classical music represents a type of knowledge to which only certain individuals have access, also referred to as privileged knowledge (Teese, 2013). Access to privileged knowledge—in a systemised pedagogical form through careful collection, sequencing, pacing, and evaluation—is usually unavailable for “those from less privileged households” (Young & Muller, 2013, p. 239). Therefore, ensuring all students have this epistemological access becomes a social imperative for schools (McPhail, 2016).

The entrenchment and reification of existing disadvantages and inequalities of opportunity stemming from unequally distributed cultural capital in education are consistent with Freire’s (2005) critical pedagogy. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) contended that teachers must encourage students to challenge the status quo (e.g., inequalities and injustices) by questioning traditional power dynamics and fostering critical thinking through self-reflection. He explained his notion of *freedom* as students needing to eject the internalised image that “nothing could be done about the educational consequence of economic inequalities and social justice” and “replace it with autonomy and responsibility” (Darder, 2020, p. 180). In the context of music education, students from working-class backgrounds may experience *a fear of freedom* (Freire, 2005) due to their adherence to the prescribed guidelines of the internalised authority, leading them to view themselves as not possessing or capable of acquiring the specialised knowledge necessary for success in music. This suggests that working-class students may view themselves as non-elite and anticipate failing in music, as they recognise their inability to compete with elite peers who acquire cultural capital in the form of musical literacy and advanced performance techniques and skills. Consequently, these working-class students internalise the image of elite peers succeeding in music, with their possessed cultural capital, while they themselves anticipate failing due to their lack of cultural capital (Darder, 2020). They adopt the belief that they will not succeed in music or possess the same cultural capital, including access to private music lessons, musical literacy (reading music notation and analysing harmony and melody), advanced performance skills, and music certifications. To free students from this

internalised image of non-elite in music, teachers need to collaborate with them through a problem-solving approach and meaningful dialogue within the context of liberative education. This encompasses trying to understand the world we inhabit in relation to the changes required to guarantee our right to be active subjects responsible for our own decisions. For instance, students and teachers could engage in a dialogue, exploring the roles that musical literacy plays in music education or discussing personal connections with Western classical music to reveal students' distinct musical meanings. They could examine how Western classical music is perceived in the school community and/or society. As an activity, students could compose a song, then teach it to their peers without relying on traditional music or graphic notation (see Image 2 presented earlier in this chapter). Through this process, students may discover the benefits of notation when communicating musical ideas to others. In this context, integrating Western classical music and fostering musical literacy in school may promote opportunities for students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Inclusion in Music Curriculum

The traditional model of the music curriculum centres primarily on Western classical music appreciation, music theory, and musical literacy, but there have been gradual shifts away from this model. These shifts reflect a persistent concern that students may feel alienated from school music education due to the disparity between the music they enjoy outside of school and what they learn in the classroom, despite their active engagement with music beyond the classroom (Fuller, 2022; Philpott, 2022).

A focus on inclusion in education has sought to address this concern by adding the types of music students listen to into the music curriculum, thus alleviating feelings of disconnection and alienation (Green, 1999; Philpott, 2022). Hence, this section focuses on advocates for utilitarian, praxial and open approaches to music education in contemporary classrooms (Barrett, 2007; Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000).

Music teachers who advocate for an approach to music education that goes beyond fostering aesthetic appreciation (intrinsic value) endeavour to develop and cultivate students' general academic and cognitive skills. This

approach seeks to offer meaningful musical experiences that actively engage students in their learning journey (Hargreaves, 2003), aligning with praxial and open philosophies through the integration of popular music in the classroom (McPhail, 2013; Shepherd & Vulliamy, 1994). This perspective resonates with Dunbar-Hall's (2005) assertion that music education can be defined as a subject "concerned with uncovering the differences and power relationships among groups of people and their cultures ... to bring the music curriculum closer to the realities of everyday life—realities that involve poverty, ownership, and social justice" (pp. 33-34). In this sense, music education can bridge the gap between the curriculum and students' everyday lives (Green, 1999; Philpott, 2022). In line with this approach, music teachers use popular music as a means to explore social and political issues that resonate with students' lived experiences (Green, 2006). As noted in an example earlier, teachers could demonstrate how genres such as blues and jazz can facilitate discussions on topics such as poverty, racism, and slavery (McPhail, 2013; Springer, 2016). Integrating popular music into discussions of sociopolitical issues in music classrooms not only provides students with opportunities to develop their comprehension of these topics but also supports the development of students' musical identity and fosters peer acceptance (Walter, 2018). This is discussed in greater detail in the section on the advantages of informal learning practice.

According to Green (2006), delineated musical meaning refers to "the extra-musical concepts that music carries, that is, its social, cultural, religious, political, or other such associations" (p. 102). She observed that music can function like a piece of clothing, conveying a symbol of or information about one's social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, subculture, and political values (Green, 1999). Music can be worn by students as "a public expression within the school, which may [represent or] conceal part of the students' private identity" (Green, 1999, p. 167). Musical "clothing may be worn only in the privacy of the home or other situations beyond the school" (Green, 1999, p. 167). In this context, students may hope to be accepted and recognised by their peers by aligning themselves with particular musical genres or styles. For example, students may seek peer acceptance by acknowledging hip-hop as their preferred genre of music. This example aligns with Ng's (2018) argument that peer-directed popular music learning encourages students to make

informed decisions about sound, which leads to the interweaving of sociocultural identities. Moreover, lifelong musical engagement is promoted while acknowledging and respecting all music traditions by bridging the gap between the traditional way of learning music and students' diverse musical experiences. This approach also facilitates an understanding of how music influences and reflects cultural, social, political, and identity norms, whether reinforcing them or challenging them (Abramo, 2025; Horsley & Waldron, 2017).

Additionally, students contribute to co-constructing musical knowledge through interactions with both peers and teachers (Cooke & Spruce, 2016; Creech et al., 2020; Young, 2021). In this regard, music curriculum is understood as a "lived experience" (Cooke & Spruce, 2016, p. 74), that learning and meaning-making emerge from interactions, which aligns with Aoki's (2004a) notion of curriculum-as-lived-experiences. Imagine a classroom where students are actively engaged in discussions about different genres of music, freely expressing and sharing information about their favourite singers, bands or composers with teachers and their peers. Through this active engagement and participation, students not only learn from their teachers but also from each other, sharing ideas, perspectives, and personal experiences, and accepting one another.

Lastly, this approach is derived from an argument that popular music holds the potential to positively influence multicultural music education due to a focus on a diverse range of style(s) which is often linked to "specific ethnicities, ideologies, religions, and sexualities" (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000, p. 26). However, Philpott (2022) argued that despite being aimed at fostering and promoting inclusion, the integration of popular music into the curriculum has oversimplified the concept of social justice. Oversimplification may reduce social justice efforts to mere checkboxes on a list, overlooking the complexities involved. The basic inclusion of popular music and other genres in the curriculum does not guarantee true inclusivity. Again, imagine a classroom where students and a music teacher learn popular music and other genres to promote diversity and inclusivity. The teacher may only focus on surface-level aspects of popular music and other genres (e.g., analysing rhythmic patterns and/or harmony and melody) without delving into their deeper cultural or historical significance (Bradley, 2006; Joseph & Southcott, 2009).

Challenges and Cultural Influences on Music Teachers' Practices

Music teachers face a range of broader contextual and institutional challenges that shape their curriculum and pedagogical practices (Pascoe et al., 2005; West, 2012). These include the marginalisation of music within crowded school curricula (Aróstegui, 2016; Bell-Robertson, 2014; Ewing, 2013; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017; Lemon & Garvis, 2013; West, 2012), limited time to teach and plan music lessons, funding and resources (Gill, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2005; Watson, 2010), and varying levels of support for school leadership team members and colleagues (including non-music teachers) (Carrillo et al., 2015; Conway, 2015; Savage, 2017). Music teachers may also need to respond to students with diverse cultural, linguistic and musical backgrounds, requiring them to adapt curriculum content and pedagogical approaches to different experiences and expectations (Barton & Riddle, 2022).

In addition, music teaching practices are shaped by cultural contexts and teachers' own musical and educational experiences (Barton, 2018; Barton & Riddle, 2022; Ho, 2022; Wright, 2008). Cultural values and prior experiences can influence understandings of legitimate musical knowledge, repertoire selection and pedagogical practices, while students' diverse cultural and musical backgrounds may require teachers to reconsider assumptions about how music should be taught and learned (Barton & Riddle, 2022; Ho, 2022). While these broader challenges form part of the context in which music teachers work, a comprehensive examination of them is beyond the scope of this inquiry, which focuses specifically on how I negotiated the Victorian music curriculum to engage Year 7 and 8 students.

Exploring Music Teachers' Changing Pedagogies

Music teachers' differing perspectives on the purpose of music education have redefined the music curriculum in schools, triggering a shift in pedagogies. Pedagogy in music education not only encompasses a variety of teaching approaches like Dalcroze Eurythmics, Kodály and Orff Schulwerk (each highlighting different aspects of musical development, such as movement, vocal training and percussion-based music making, respectively) (Australian National Council of Orff Schulwerk, 2023; Dalcroze Australia, 2022; Kodály music

education institute of Australia, n.d), but also refers to how teachers deliver curriculum content to a class through formal, informal and non-formal pedagogy (Cain, 2015; Hall et al., 2021; Storsve, 2026). It is important to interpret the term *pedagogy* beyond a narrow focus on teaching approaches or strategies, as it is “deeply saturated with the values and history of the society and community in which it is located” (Alexander, 2013, p. 92). In this sense, it is essential to begin by clarifying what formal, informal pedagogy and non-formal teaching are taken to mean in the context of this inquiry. I use the terms *formal, informal and non-formal teaching and learning* in this inquiry to refer to pedagogies used in the context of school music education, not outside-school learning activities. In addition, various scholars use different terms to describe these pedagogies; for example, formal and informal learning (Folkestad, 2006; Storsve, 2026; Wright, 2016), formal and informal pedagogy (Cain, 2013; Mariguddi, 2020; Ng, 2020), formal and informal learning practices (Green, 1999, 2002, 2006; Papazachariou-Christoforou, 2023), and formal and informal instructional approaches (Jenkins, 2011).

Another crucial aspect to consider is that informal learning has been extensively researched in music education (Barton & Riddle, 2022; Burnard & Trulsson, 2016; Carrillo & González-Moreno, 2025; Choong, 2023; Crawford, 2017; Davis, 2013; Finney & Philpott, 2010; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2006, 2008; Green & Narita, 2015; Hallam et al., 2017a; Jaffurs, 2004; Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; Jenkins, 2011; Kanellopoulos et al., 2016; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012; Kastner, 2020; La Belle, 1982; Lonie & Dickens, 2016; Mak, 2006; Nethsinghe et al., 2023; Rodriguez, 2009; Storsve, 2026; Werquin, 2010; Wright, 2013; Zhang, 2022). The terms *formal, informal and non-formal teaching and learning* are widely used and subject to various interpretations of *approach, pedagogy, teaching and learning, learning practice and method*, which are used interchangeably in this inquiry depending on the context (Wright, 2016). Cain (2013) argued that pedagogies with similar features can be grouped and labelled for discussion purposes, such as the traditional mode of teaching or formal pedagogy, and the populist mode of teaching or informal pedagogy. In this context, this inquiry explores the pedagogy of music education through what Cain (2013) classifies as formal, informal and non-formal pedagogy.

Defining Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning

In school education, the general definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning are as follows:

- ✚ Formal learning is usually affiliated with colleges and training institutions, ranging from primary school to university (Mak, 2006; Wright, 2016).
- ✚ Non-formal learning is connected to community groups and other organisations, which encompasses a wide range of highly contextualised, participatory educational activities outside traditional school settings (Rogers, 2005).
- ✚ Informal learning includes interactions with friends, family members and co-workers, which entail all (intentional and/or non-intentional) educational experiences outside formal and non-formal settings (Mak, 2006).

However, Folkestad (2006) argued that these general definitions are oversimplified, inaccurate, and assume that “formal learning occurs only in institutional settings and informal learning occurs only outside school” (p. 142). Folkestad (2006) compared the differences between formal and informal learning by analysing whether the activity is pre-planned by a teacher who also directs the activity, in which case Folkestad (2006) defined it as formal. Informal learning, in contrast, is not planned; it develops naturally from a musical activity such as composing, performing and improvising, and through the interaction of the players (Folkestad, 2006). Non-formal teaching is identified as having several common characteristics of informal learning, such as:

- ✚ “an inclusive approach to music-making, lowering entry barriers (for example, by not making notation a hurdle to be overcome before a student can play)
- ✚ a sense of immediacy and exploration
- ✚ a more democratic view of learning - utilising the skills within the group through peer learning, teachers shedding the mantle of ‘expert’, students and teachers co-constructing content and objectives for sessions” (D’Amore, 2009, p. 44)

- ✚ opportunities to “develop non-cognitive skills, such as responsibility, empathy, support for others, creativity and improvisation to find solutions” (Vasil et al., 2019, p. 255).

What distinguishes whether non-formal teaching and learning accompanies informal learning or is an activity perhaps more adequately defined as non-formal learning is probably the locus of control and ownership of the activity (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Storsve, 2026; Wright, 2016). For example, if a music teacher plans and leads the musical activity but also incorporates elements of co-construction of musical knowledge, peer learning and support into their teaching practice, it may be viewed as further along the non-formal range of the continuum. In contrast, if students have free choice in the music they engage with, design or set their own goals, and take the lead in sequencing their learning, with the music teacher as a facilitator, this approach may be viewed as informal learning. However, informal learning, when taking place inside a classroom or other educational context, is always supported by teachers and always involves a degree of non-formal teaching (Chua & Ho, 2013; Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Storsve, 2026; Wright, 2016).

It is essential to understand that the distinctions between formal, non-formal, and informal learning should not be viewed as universally applicable across cultural contexts. Music teaching and learning are socially and culturally situated, and the ways in which music is learned, taught and understood can be different across cultural and educational contexts (Barton, 2018; Barton & Riddle, 2022). What may be viewed as formal, non-formal and informal learning within Western educational traditions may not necessarily be viewed in the same way in other cultural contexts. Therefore, in this inquiry, these terms are not used as universal classifications of music learning, but as contextual conceptual distinctions for discussing teaching and learning practices within Victorian school music education.

Formal Learning Practices

Folkestad (2006) defined formal learning practice by analysing whether the practice is sequenced ahead of time by a teacher who also directs the activity. Werquin (2010) described formal learning practice as organised and structured,

with clear learning objectives, because it is always intentional from the students' viewpoint. For example, the students' goal is to gain knowledge and/or skills. Similarly, Jenkins (2011) and Ng (2020) explained that formal learning practice is designed to systematise and account for learning. It is deliberate, supervised, teacher-centred, and enforced in highly sequential and organised contexts in schools. Further, students must achieve predetermined goals based on the teacher's understanding of the national curriculum (Ng, 2020). Other scholars have also specified formal learning practice and its characteristics as follows:

- ✚ Curriculum-based, “teacher-driven or at least teacher-initiated” (Boekaerts & Minnaert, 1999, p. 537); the *what* and *how* to learn and teach are predefined (Folkestad, 2006; Mak, 2006; Wright, 2016; Zhang, 2022).
- ✚ Hierarchical curriculum—that is, basic skills and expertise are learned first, then more complex types are constructed based on them (Greene, 2014; Ng, 2020).

In music education, formal learning practice means that the teacher's and students' minds are focused on learning *how to play and make music* (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2006). Green (2002) noted that formal music learning refers to “classroom music teachers' practices of teaching, training and educating; and to pupils and students' experiences of learning and of being taught, educated, or trained in a formal educational setting” (p. 36). These meanings align with Lines' (2013) observation that the study of music has mainly been concerned with the demands of music itself as “tonal moving modes or humanly ordered sound, concentrating on both formalist and human-centred expressions of music study like performing, composing, and music scholarship” (p. 24). Barton and Riddle (2022) concurred with Lines (2013), noting that traditional or formal learning in music relies heavily on linguistic modes of representation and composition, using spoken language of instruction and textual musical information. Green (2006) advocated for a model of formal learning that encompasses studying music theory, including reading and writing notation on manuscript paper and analysing the harmony and melody of songs within the Western canon. This also requires advanced music performance skills (Barrett, 2007). Jenkins (2011) provided a specific example of six-year-old

Holly, who learns a C major scale by reading the musical notation, playing the C major scale, and gradually internalising the tonal and structural relationships that govern a major scale, tone and semitone, under her music teacher's demonstration, guidance and supervision. This is referred to as learning *how to play* music rather than *playing* music (Folkestad, 2006).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Formal Learning Practices

The advantage of formal learning practices in music education is that musical skills are more easily transferable across a range of situations (Jenkins, 2011; Zhang, 2022). For instance, students who can read music scores would learn to play a variety of styles by reading music notation, helping them quickly grasp the fundamentals of those styles (Jenkins, 2011). Moreover, reading music notation and acquiring advanced performance techniques to play instruments through formal pedagogy in school can also provide opportunities for students who lack access to privileged knowledge (as discussed in the previous section).

Jenkins (2011), however, also warned that formal learning practices restrict students' individual tendencies to seek their own voice and express themselves uniquely. For instance, students in music classrooms that focus on music literacy and Western classical music may miss out on opportunities to improvise or compose their own music. They might also have their creativity restricted by learning prescribed skills and techniques in structured and already planned learning settings (Choong, 2023). Furthermore, Zhang (2022) suggested that relying on music notation to play music could hinder students' performance skills and techniques; popular musicians are not restricted in their approaches to performance and practice, allowing them to experiment and develop unique techniques to achieve their desired outcomes. As Alper (2007) noted, no one tells popular musicians they cannot do things in a certain way; they experiment to discover unique techniques to achieve their goals (Zhang, 2022). The problem with emphasising learning music pieces in formal learning practices, prioritising reading and writing music notation and listening to Western classical music, is that mastering a piece and acquiring musical literacy and knowledge become, first and foremost, objects. In other words, the flow of students' musical experience becomes less important than a greater focus on a piece of music to be learned (Lines, 2013). In this sense, a student

whose music education focuses on the technicalities of music rather than performance and participation could become detached in their relationship to music, resulting in a loss of interest over time in favour of activities that offer more personal rewards (Jenkins, 2011). Students might also be unable to comprehend and thereby appreciate the music usually taught in schools because they are unfamiliar with Western classical music or disconnected from how popular music is taught in a traditional or formal approach (Jenkins, 2011). Students' unfamiliarity with, or disconnection from, popular music as taught in school through a formal approach (i.e., reading music notation to play instruments and analysing the melody and harmony and chord progressions of a popular song) mirrors what Green (2006) termed *delineated musical meaning* in the sociology of music education. She explained that students' delineated meaning is difficult to change because students have their own delineations and interests, which the school can either reinforce or leave in a cultural sphere separate from the school (Green, 1999). For example, students have delineated classical music as "femininity and more radically, effeminacy", associating it with playing the piano and other classical instruments (Green, 1999, p. 166). At the same time, they have viewed popular music as "masculinity", associating it with playing the drums and electric or bass guitar (Green, 1999, p. 166). Green (1999) also argued that music teachers often require students to engage in music whose delineations may or may not correspond to their "self-images, social backgrounds, public or private identities, values and desires" (Green, 1999, p. 168). As a consequence, this conflict affects each student's overall musical experiences in the classroom. To overcome such conflict and change students' (already formed) delineations of other styles of music, Green (2002, 2006) suggested informal learning practices in the music class (as discussed in the next section).

Another example of incorporating popular music in the classroom traditionally or formally involved music teachers analysing musical form, chord progressions, and the meaning of lyrics (Green, 2006). This approach focused on traditional notation (or linguistic modes) and promoted the "creation of Western art music-style concert performances for popular music" (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016, p. 215). The inclusion of popular music as a subject of study in Australian secondary music curricula can be traced back to the 1970s, following the

implementation of the *Racial Discrimination Act* (1975) (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000). The inclusion and incorporation of popular music in the (secondary) school music curricula challenged many music teachers who lacked experience or training in popular music, or in applying music teaching and learning principles to their repertoires. Reading and writing music notation had therefore become the focus of much music teaching and learning in the Australian music education context (Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000). Although the content of music lessons has evolved to include popular music, pedagogical approaches continue to perpetuate the underlying values of classical aesthetics, such as complexity, originality, and universality (Allsup, 2016; Philpott, 2017). In this context, music teachers not only deliver popular music through the curriculum in the same way as Western classical music is delivered, but also establish teacher-directed pedagogies grounded in the Western music tradition (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, students without prior music education could be alienated in their music classes (Green, 1999; Wright, 2008) and have little appreciation for popular music education (Vulliamy, 2017). As a result of these issues inherent in the music classroom, students often respond to school music programs with apathy due to the disparity between their musical experiences inside and outside of school (Barrett, 2007; Fuller, 2022; Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; Springer, 2016). This disparity occurs because the music curriculum is not embodied within students' lives (Pinar et al., 1995), leading to school music programs becoming meaningless (Kim, 2008).

Folkestad (2006) proposed that “the great majority of musical learning takes place outside school, in a situation in which there is no teacher, and the intention of the activity is not to *learn about music (learning how to play music)*, but to *play music*” (p. 136). However, in playing music, students also learn *how* to play music and about music. When they are engaged with popular songs, they naturally develop music appreciation skills by actively listening to the music they play or perform. Students become more familiar with theoretical concepts (e.g., rhythm, melody, dynamics, timbre, and tempo), even if they are not acquainted with such technical terminology. Moreover, students refine specific performance techniques and skills tailored to their chosen musical instruments, like mastering finger placement. Listening to and making music has become a significant part of young adolescent learners' lives as a result of recent

technological advances and the reach of the media (Folkestad, 2006; Folkestad et al., 1998; Vanka et al., 2023). This suggests that a music teacher never faces “musically ignorant, untutored or uneducated students” (Folkestad, 2006, p. 136); rather, when they arrive at school, students all have a diverse and, in some respects, advanced musical knowledge gained through a range of extracurricular musical activities outside of school.

Musical Identity and Meaningful Learning in Music Education

The notion of musical identity, which encompasses an individual’s “musical tastes, values, practices, skills and knowledge that are acquired through music experiences” (Ripani, 2022, p. 274), could help in understanding the problems with secondary school music education (Hargreaves, 2003; Lage-Gómez & Cremades-Andreu, 2021). Musical identity is understood as both an individual and social construct, reflecting the interplay between individual characteristics and social influences. This aligns with Philpott and Kubilius’ (2015) view that there must be “a space in the curriculum for students to perceive themselves and who they are reflected in the music they make” (p. 429). Students’ musical identities are inextricably linked to the importance of popular music in out-of-school settings; the discrepancy between classroom music and everyday music can be crucial for them. Therefore, the “musical identities of both students and teachers are likely to influence the success of school music” (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003, p. 263).

To ensure that music education has meaning for students, music teachers must provide the opportunity for tacit learning and adopt a democratic view of learning that includes students’ wishes, such as co-constructing content and objectives for lessons that allow students’ input (Allsup, 2008). In other words, both teachers and students are on equal ground in democratic classrooms in which ideas are shared and created (Draper, 2019; Jaffurs, 2004; Kanellopoulos, 2025). By adopting such an approach, music learning in the classroom becomes “something done *with* and *by* students, not *to* and *for* them” (D’Amore, 2009, p. 44). In consideration of the need to ensure that music education is meaningful to students, music education researchers have recommended implementing informal learning practices to teach popular music

(Barrett, 2007; Burnard & Trulsson, 2016; Dunbar-Hall & Wemyss, 2000; Green, 1999; Springer, 2016; Werquin, 2010).

Informal Learning Practices

Informal learning is not a modern concept. It is characterised as “the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8). In the school context, University-Sector Framework Implementation Network (2011) defined informal learning as “not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support and is unintentional from the learner’s point of view” (p. 68). Boekaerts and Minnaert (1999) described informal learning as a pedagogy that is “active, voluntary, self-discovering, self-determined, open-ended, non-threatening, enjoyable, and explorative” (p. 536).

Informal music learning practices prioritise aligning education with how students naturally engage with music, aiming to foster ways of learning that create and develop students’ personal connection with music by providing “a meaningful and lived way of being in and with music” (Kanellopoulos et al., 2016, p. 144). Thus, the adaptation of informal learning practices positively influences students’ making sense of music and their musical experiences (Green, 2006). This resonates with praxial and open philosophies of music education. Adopting practices that enable students to make sense of music and their musical experiences helps situate the music curriculum more firmly within students’ sociocultural realm (Barrett, 2007). This approach to teaching the music curriculum reflects the notion of curriculum as a *social engineering tool* for two reasons:

- ✚ Learners’ interests and “social and psychological milieu must be considered in developing the curriculum” (Nwaji, 2011, p. 68).
- ✚ Learning will be best achieved when the class content is within the students’ realm of understanding (Green, 2008; Gunawardena et al., 2024; McPhail, 2013; Nwaji, 2011; Smart & Green, 2017; Wright, 2016).

Musical Futures (<https://www.musicalfuturesaustralia.org>), which was established in the UK in 2003 and introduced to Australia in 2010 (Crawford,

2017), is an example of implementing informal learning in Australian schools. This pedagogical approach was created for secondary students in Year 7 to 10 (aged 11 to 14), with the aim of addressing the growing challenges of youth disengagement (D'Amore, 2009; Gubbins, 2024; Ng, 2018; Zhang, 2022). Musical Futures supports a student-oriented approach that focuses on student engagement, involvement and personal autonomy. It promotes lifelong learning through meaningful interaction with music while ensuring understanding and support of the musical cultures of students (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; Kastner, 2020; Philpott, 2022). Assessment of this pedagogical approach has demonstrated that student learning and engagement have improved, prompting a re-evaluation of current teaching practices and support (Gubbins, 2024; Ng, 2018).

In the music education context, informal learning develops through a musical activity and player interaction (Folkestad, 2006). In this sense, students' and teachers' attention is centred on *playing and making music* (instead of learning *how to play and make music*) (Folkestad, 2006). According to Green (2006) and others (Fuller, 2022; Jenkins, 2011; Mariguddi & Shirley, 2024; Storsve, 2026; Wright, 2016; Zhang, 2022), informal learning pedagogy is based on five concepts:

- ✚ learner-initiated music selection
- ✚ skills learnt by aural copying of recordings
- ✚ collaborative work in peer groups
- ✚ holistic, non-linear learning rather than pre-planned approaches
- ✚ a focus on individual creativity and a holistic combination of composing, improvising, listening and performing

These five concepts align with the notion of authentic learning, where students are motivated to solve real-world problems through hands-on learning, collaboration, and engaging with multiple sources and perspectives (Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007; Ruhanen et al., 2021). In this approach, students are not provided with a list of resources; instead, they are required to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information. For instance, students need to determine if a chosen piece of music is at an appropriate level for them to learn. Drawing on

Green's (2002, 2006) ideas, Jenkins (2011) explained that there are three stages to copying recordings by ear:

- ✚ beginning with a class discussion, followed by a task for students to bring in a Compact Disc (CD) containing a song of their choice (or utilise platforms such as YouTube, Apple Music, Spotify, or SoundCloud, which are more relevant in 2026);
- ✚ each student is free to select any musical instrument available, regardless of their prior familiarity with it; and
- ✚ they then proceed to form groups of three to five peers and attempt to replicate the chosen song on their chosen instrument, emulating popular musicians.

Copying recordings by ear offers students numerous benefits, such as the opportunity to take control of their own learning process, to demonstrate student agency, and to learn music they enjoy and with which they are familiar (Jenkins, 2011). This approach is compatible with Green's (1999) concept of delineated musical meaning (explored in the previous section). In addition, copying recordings by ear includes the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and digital technology as learning tools, which was specifically recommended in the *Report of the National Review of School Music Education* (Pascoe et al., 2005), and is now required in Victorian school curriculum guidelines (Stevens, n.d.; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.-a).

In Australia, informal learning in music education emerged in the mid-1970s (Finney & Philpott, 2010), as a result of the advent of multicultural music education (Walter, 2018). This was when the postmodern paradigm on curricula began to arise (as discussed previously) because of a growing interest in reconsidering formalised learning in school environments and all the diverse ways of learning that occur in informal musical learning activities outside schools (Folkestad, 2006). This postmodern perspective led to a shift of focus from *how to teach* (pedagogy) to *what to teach and learn* (the content of learning) and *how to learn* (the ways of learning) (Folkestad, 2006). In other words, it describes how learners interpret, experience, and express themselves through musical activities.

Advantages of Informal Learning Practices for Music Teachers

Various scholars (Brandman, 2016; Carroll, 2017, 2020; Crawford, 2017; Hallam et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Jeanneret, 2010; Jeanneret et al., 2011; Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; John & Evans, 2013) have investigated the implementation of Musical Futures as an informal learning practice in Australia and its effect on teachers and students. These studies highlighted some common themes, such as:

- ✚ music teachers' perceptions of students' musical progression.
- ✚ music teachers' perceived effectiveness, confidence, and enjoyment in relation to teaching music.

Hallam et al. (2017a, 2017b, 2017c), Moore (2019) and Spears (2024) reported that negotiating the music curriculum and adopting Musical Futures as one of the informal learning practices in the music classroom have improved students' musical skills, performance techniques, listening abilities, and understanding of various genres. Implementing informal learning practices also helps increase students' enjoyment, motivation, and independent learning capabilities, which encourages meaningful participation in music learning (Cremades-Andreu & Lage-Gómez, 2024; Kastner, 2020; Moore, 2019). Moreover, informal learning practices affect music teachers' perceptions of their confidence, effectiveness and enjoyment in teaching music. Some scholars (Hallam et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Jeanneret et al., 2011; Mariguddi & Shirley, 2024) have found that for some music teachers, informal learning pedagogies enabled them to become more effective teachers. This is because informal learning pedagogies allow them to gain experience in musical genres with which they were unfamiliar (e.g., enabling classically trained music teachers to teach rock or popular music in the class), thereby improving their confidence. Informal learning practices also increased teachers' enjoyment of teaching music because they felt rewarded by students' excitement and enjoyment in class (Hallam et al., 2017c; Jeanneret, 2010; Jeanneret et al., 2011).

Disadvantages of Informal Learning Practices for Music Teachers

Despite the positive impact of pedagogical changes stemming from informal learning practices on music teachers, some issues have been raised. These include the physical space of the classroom and its suitability for musical activities, time constraints for students' productive learning, a limited number of musical instruments or practice spaces, and limited resources to provide the necessary level of support for students (Hallam et al., 2017c; Ng, 2020).

Two perceived obstacles for music teachers in embracing informal learning practices are difficulty integrating the informal approach into the music curriculum and fear of feeling incompetent due to a perceived reduction in teacher control. Firstly, when integrating informal learning practices into the music curriculum, teachers may experience burnout. This is due to the demanding nature of music education, struggling with noise management and disruptive student behaviour (Lamont et al., 2003), including students searching for drumsticks and/or mics, arguing over roles, or realising someone forgot their CD or device (Hallam et al., 2017c). This stress can also stem from a perceived reduction in teacher control, arising from minimal teacher intervention, a pattern distinct from strategies used in formal education in the context of informal learning (Green, 2002). This mirrors Jenkins' (2011) view, which indicates that informal learning practices seem to imply "a lack of constraints, where one engages in an activity that is uncontrolled and perhaps uncontrollable" (p. 181). Music teachers feeling incompetent can also arise from concerns that they are ill-equipped to teach music because of their educational background (e.g., classically trained music teachers) and the ways they had previously taught (Hallam et al., 2017c; Mariguddi & Shirley, 2024; Massy & Sembiante, 2023; Ng, 2020). As a result, some music teachers, especially those with a background in Western classical music, can find informal learning practices stressful. They may be unfamiliar with other musical genres (particularly popular music) and possess limited skills in those areas (Lamont et al., 2003), yet may be expected to expand their knowledge of diverse musical styles.

Advantages of Informal Learning Practices for Students

Informal learning practices within a school setting encourage small-group and individual music-making and promote the values of social justice, equality and personal development (Wright, 2016). Music teachers facilitate the inclusion of students of all abilities by opening doors to music education for many who might otherwise have been excluded from music learning throughout their lives (Hallam et al., 2017a; Wright, 2016). This notion aligns with Regelski's (2003) rationale for social justice in music education. For example, in a music classroom where traditional, formal pedagogy is implemented, students who play or compose more complex pieces (e.g., incorporating music notation and analysing harmony and melody) are more likely to receive higher marks (Wright, 2016). This reflects the classical aesthetics' underlying value of complexity, which is upheld as a hallmark of high status within classical ideology (Philpott & Kubilius, 2015). In addition, Philpott and Kubilius (2015) explained that, in schools, music is treated as a commodity to be studied and as an object rather than something to be created or experienced. In this paradigm, students are seen as consumers rather than active participants in shaping the music curriculum. Wright (2015) also contended that if music education is based on an elite knowledge that is "foreign to students and requires elite knowers, many students will be excluded or choose to self-exclude" (p. 347). This is because the music that students listen to, play and study in the classroom is unfamiliar to them, which has a negative delineated meaning of the music (Green, 1999). In other words, students cannot understand why they are listening to, playing, and studying Western classical music that does not align with the music they listen to and play outside the classroom. Learning music that students have negatively delineated meaning for may contribute to "a sense of lower self-worth or potential educational ability compared to peers positioned as elite in the students' eyes" (Wright, 2015, p. 347).

The promotion of social justice and equal learning opportunities through informal learning practices is evident in research on the implementation of Musical Futures Australia. Hallam et al. (2017a, 2017b), Jeanneret et al. (2011) and Spears (2024) found that students' progression in musical skills is enhanced when music teachers and students negotiate the curriculum and

adopt informal learning practices in music classes. For example, when engaged in informal learning, students have been found to build improved musical performance, learn a broader range of musical skills, strengthen their listening skills and compositional techniques, and gain a deeper understanding of various musical genres (Hallam et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Jeanneret et al., 2011; Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016; Moore, 2019). In addition, the use of informal learning practices has been shown to raise students' achievement levels, increase their enjoyment of and positive attitude towards music classes, and enhance their motivation and ability to embrace independent learning (Hallam & Creech, 2010; Spears, 2024). Further, when students are given autonomy and agency, and encouraged to learn by ear from recordings and collaborate with peers to figure out how to play a selected song on a selected instrument (Green, 2002), they become more engaged and motivated in the learning process. This increased engagement and motivation may lead to higher goal-setting and achievement levels (Department of Education and Training, 2019). As a result, students develop positive attitudes towards their music lessons.

Another advantage of informal learning practices for students is that it helps develop students' self-identity within collaborative learning environments that are "both directive and liberative, didactic and dialogical, subject-centred and student-centred" (Jorgensen, 2003a, p. 141). In the sociology of music education, musical identity is related to the inherent and delineated meanings of music. As Green (1999) argued, music can be worn like a piece of clothing to convey information about "your class, race, gender, religion and political values" (p. 167). Jenkins (2011) elaborated on the idea that students represent or conceal their private identity by wearing a type of music as a contextual parameter of informal learning pedagogy. This is because informal learning is closely related to popular music practices, with approaches known to involve students in authentic music learning that fosters "critical and independent thinking skills, social skills, creativity and self-identity" (Ng, 2020, p. 56). Jenkins (2011) also noted that one of the benefits of informal learning practices is that they foster an atmosphere of curiosity and discovery, which empowers students and places them in control of their own learning progress.

Disadvantages of Informal Learning Practices for Students

Although informal learning promotes the values of social justice, equal opportunity, and the inclusion of students of all abilities, it has faced criticism for its role in perpetuating inequality. This is because the different values that music teachers have can influence curriculum content and classroom practice (Kanellopoulos et al., 2016). For example, certain music teachers argue for emphasising musical literacy and advanced performance skills (using Western classical music) to expand students' understanding of music (its aesthetic value) and their appreciation of music. In contrast, others advocate an approach to music education that extends beyond fostering aesthetic value, aiming instead to develop students' overall academic and cognitive abilities more broadly (its utilitarian value).

As noted in the previous section, the choices made by music teachers regarding curriculum content and pedagogical approaches further perpetuate and reify educational disadvantages and inequality of opportunity, particularly as Western classical music remains a form of knowledge accessible only to certain individuals (Apple, 2019). In other words, music teachers make value judgements about their students and provide them with varying levels of music education accordingly. This critique suggests that the musical content within the curriculum reflects the political and ideological positioning of music teachers (Shepherd & Vulliamy, 1994). Their beliefs that form classroom practices and represent a conflict between formal pedagogy (emphasising music theory and the Western canon) and informal pedagogy (incorporating popular and intercultural music) are shaped by the underlying “political, social, cultural, geographical, and economic perspectives and circumstances” of music teachers (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016, p. 218). Therefore, formal and informal knowledge is used by music teachers as “a complex filter to process people” (Apple, 2019, p. 32). Simultaneously, different values are taught to different school populations, often according to factors such as class, gender and race.

Another disadvantage is that less motivated students in music may relinquish control of their learning to those in charge and relegate themselves to more straightforward roles to stay within their comfort zones. This restricts their own learning in the process (Mariguddi & Shirley, 2024; Ng, 2020). On the other

end of the argument, some music teachers have expressed concern regarding students with advanced music abilities (Hallam et al., 2017a). They worry that opportunities provided through informal learning practices may be limited for students with advanced performance techniques, as popular music is often selected in classroom settings where more advanced students may feel less challenged (Hallam et al., 2017a).

Kanellopoulos et al. (2016) argued that informal learning is used as a pedagogical approach designed exclusively to focus on interest in popular music, thereby “missing the magical journeys of exploration students may embark on when approaching other music in similar ways” (p. 146). This mirrors Jenkins’ (2011) argument that informal learning practices have potential pedagogical limitations. In a similar vein, Ng (2020) asserted that the skill set and learning processes “may not be applicable to other musical styles where [more] directed and formal learning may be [more] appropriate and an incentive to study other music styles” (p. 59). In addition, through an informal learning approach, students’ interests are focused on the utilitarian value of music, which could lead to a failure to appreciate the intrinsic value of music (Jenkins, 2011). This aligns with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s (2021) statement regarding learning in music, which emphasises that students listen to, compose and perform songs in a range of musical styles from different cultures and eras.

Wright (2016), however, argued that when students have ongoing opportunities to choose music themselves, they tend to choose from a wider range of styles and eras than when they first began participating in classroom music. This gradual exploration unfolds as students’ ears are opened through their music education, and they begin to listen to different types of music, including Western classical music (Wright, 2016). Wright’s (2016) argument resonated with the views of Green (2006) and others (McPhail, 2013; Westerlund, 2008; Wright, 2008), who claimed that popular music has been included in schools to satisfy students’ musical tastes, in the hope of expanding their musical range to include appreciation of Western classical (and other types of) music.

Allsup (2008) interrogated Green’s (2002) approach to informal learning practices within the context of popular music, focusing on the practices of

Anglo-American guitar musicians. He raised concerns about the potential narrowing of musical possibilities, rather than broadening students' musical range to encompass the appreciation of Western classical and other types of music (Allsup, 2008). For example, whether drawing pedagogical inspiration from popular music, which is predominantly male and white, represents progress toward diversifying classroom offerings. Björck (2011) and Butler et al. (2021) found that the literature on gender and popular music learning suggests informal learning practices often favour male students. In addition, the gender influence on the selection of musical instruments in popular music reveals how female students may feel pressured to select instruments perceived as technically easier and less appealing to male students, such as the bass guitar (Butler et al., 2021; Clawson, 1999). These perspectives demonstrate the relationship between informal music learning, gender influences, inclusivity, culture, identity and access to musical opportunities, all of which highlight the importance of critically examining and addressing gender issues within music education practice.

Synthesis of Formal and Informal Learning Practices

To reconcile the conflict between formal and informal learning practices in music education, some scholars have suggested that music in school education contains elements of both pedagogies (Folkestad, 2006) and mostly sits between the poles of formal-informal learning practices (Jenkins, 2011; Storsve, 2026). Cain (2013) accentuated the importance of moving beyond a two-dimensional perspective, placing pedagogies on a formal-informal spectrum to provoke new ways of thinking. Ng (2020) also advocated for a combination of formal and informal pedagogies in “constant, complementary dialogue within and beyond the classroom, leading to a holistic curriculum and learner experience” (p. 57). Further, Barton and Riddle (2022) argued that the formal-informal music learning continuum should be adopted to examine the challenges surrounding the respect for all musical activities and cultures.

Ng (2020) observed that two classroom music teachers preferred to establish a foundational understanding of music through a combination of formal and non-formal teaching approaches before transitioning to informal learning sessions. Wright (2016), among others (Ho, 2013; Ng, 2020; Storsve,

2026), further argued that non-formal teaching is integral to informal learning practices, as informal learning in music education relies on non-formal teaching. For example, if an activity is planned and led by a music teacher but also includes elements of peer learning and support, this activity can be categorised as non-formal teaching. Informal learning, when taking place inside a classroom or other educational context, is always supported by teachers and involves a degree of non-formal teaching (Mok, 2011; Wright, 2016).

Crawford (2017) also emphasised the importance of integrating formal and informal learning practices. Music teachers' work is complex, and an adequate balance of pedagogies is needed to promote student engagement and participation while meeting curriculum requirements and "expanding students' learning capacity beyond the limitations and simplicity of popular music" (Crawford, 2017, p. 30). Kastner (2020) endorsed the 'fundamental learning first, exploration learning later' approach, which can be viewed as an interconnection of formal and informal learning practices. Lastly, McPhail (2013) stressed that a teacher's ability to 'find balance' between their chosen content and pedagogical approaches is the critical factor for ensuring that informal learning leads to meaningful education, stating:

The music classroom needs to be a site [where] both affirmation and dissonance co-exist. In the former, teachers aim to develop skills of musical experience that are embodied by students in socially meaningful ways, and in [the] latter, teachers challenge narrow and comfortable accounts of what students consider to be music, bringing students into contact with conceptual knowledge—both old and newly developing—that is collectively regarded as foundational and powerful within the field. (p. 17)

Revisiting the Context

This literature review has explored the various philosophies of music education, each offering a framework for determining the value of music in schools. These are:

- ✚ utilitarian (Crooke, 2016; Eutsler, 2017; Fiol & Perman, 2024; Mantie, 2022; McCarthy & Goble, 2005; Temmerman, 1991; Váradi, 2022)
- ✚ aesthetic (Hargreaves, 2003; Leonhard, 1965; Reimer, 1970, 2003)
- ✚ praxial (Alperson, 1994; Elliott, 1995, 2012; Regelski, 2022; Small, 1998)
- ✚ experience-based (Reimer, 2003)
- ✚ social justice (Jorgensen, 2003b; Regelski, 2005)
- ✚ open philosophies (Allsup, 2016)

These music education philosophies have influenced the historical development of the Australian music curriculum, from the utilitarian values of class singing (in the 19th century) to the incorporation of technology and aesthetic appreciation (in the mid-20th century). There has been a significant shift towards a dynamic process in the music curriculum (Philpott, 2022), reflecting evolving educational paradigms and societal needs (Barrett, 2005; Cooke & Spruce, 2016). Music teachers play a crucial role in this shift, utilising different pedagogical approaches informed by aesthetic, utilitarian, praxial and open rationales of primary and secondary music education. Moreover, investigating formal, non-formal and informal learning practices highlights the shifting pedagogical approaches in school music education. While formal learning practices offer structure and other opportunities, such as an open door for privileged knowledge (Teese, 2013) that is often not available within the home environment (Folkestad, 2006; Werquin, 2010; Young & Muller, 2013), informal learning practices (including Musical Futures) empower students through autonomy and engagement by integrating popular music (Department of Education and Training, 2019; Green, 2002; Hallam et al., 2017b). However, several challenges prevail, including teachers feeling incompetent due to a perceived reduction of classroom control (Jenkins, 2011; Mariguddi & Shirley, 2024) or feeling unprepared to teach music because of their musical education background, or the ways they had previously taught (Hallam et al., 2017c; Massy & Sembiante, 2023; Ng, 2020). Given the ongoing conflict between formal and informal learning practices in music education, scholars (Jenkins, 2011; Ng, 2020; Storsve, 2026) have suggested integrating formal and informal learning practices to address students' diverse learning needs, with the potential to foster holistic musical development and appreciation.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Frameworks: Thinking with Theories

Author Note

I wrote the first and the third-last lines of the reflection presented below, translanguaging between English and Korean. Inter-mixing or blending different languages in a spoken or written context (Yeom, 2024) disrupts accepted hierarchies of language and enables minoritised peoples to express themselves (Bouza, 2021). For example, the Korean word written below (meaning ‘to breathe’), is often used when expressing a certain belief, thought, or spirit that is embedded in something.

‘숨쉬다 (soom-she-da)’

I could find no English words (that I know of) to convey a similar meaning. Consequently, I decided to use this particular Korean word, translating it into English to “let the meaning guide me”, even though the line flow is sacrificed as a result (Pevear & Volokhonsky, 2010, p. 13).

This inquiry breathes at the intersection of critical pedagogy and affect theory, where education is viewed as not mere knowledge transmission, but
The pursuit of meaningful change, as an act of love and resistance.

Freire (2005), Apple (2019) and Giroux (2020) advocated for critical pedagogy and drawing on their scholarship has enabled me to interrogate the power dynamics in music education, and
Envisioned the classroom as an arena for change.

Hegemonic Western classical music traditions existing in music curriculum,
I asked myself, who benefited/welcomed the most, and
Who felt excluded in the classroom space.

Positioned between the marginalised and privileged,
 I am a female migrant, a cultural minority,
 A music teacher and inquirer who has access to privileged knowledge.

My emotional reactions to educational situations,
 Ahmed (2014a) said my emotions were not my personal feelings, but
 Collective social and political forces.

I raise my voice as a teacher and inquirer,
 To ask readers (of this thesis) to reflect upon their positionality and
 To see the interplay between the privileged and the marginalised.

This inquiry is a critical autoethnography,
 A weaving of my personal narratives,
 Intertwining critical pedagogy and my lived experiences.

Education transcends mere knowledge transmission,
 It is an act of love and resistance, and about creating a space, where
 Every student and teacher feel seen, heard and valued.

This is where my inquiry breathes,
 At the intersection of critical pedagogy and affect theory,
 Which urges us to question, feel, and transform.

Situating the Inquiry Within Theoretical Frameworks

By re-reading my teaching and learning experiences through thinking with critical pedagogy and affect theory, I reflexively examined how both my **positionality** (e.g., being at the centre of authority in the music classroom while existing in the periphery as a migrant from a minority cultural background) and my **emotional reactions** to educational situations (e.g., frustration with students' and their parents' concert etiquette) created power dynamics and boundaries in the classroom space.

Thinking with critical pedagogy and affect theory helped me understand

how my view of the purpose of secondary music education shifted and evolved over time. Initially, my approach to teaching music to Years 7 and 8 students was informed by the intrinsic value of music education, which emphasises music's aesthetic development, emotional expression, and appreciation of music for its own sake (Reimer, 1989b). This intrinsic value was demonstrated in my focus on teaching students to read and write music notation, analyse harmony and melody, and perform Western classical pieces with advanced performance techniques. Over the years of teaching, my view shifted, evolved, and transformed into what Allsup (2016) termed an open philosophy, which champions a moral vision of music education. This approach challenges traditional curricula that emphasise reproducing musical works and techniques, leaving little room for exploration or creativity (Allsup, 2016). The shift in my view of music education's purpose is described through life history and autobiographical narratives, and my teaching experiences are interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and affect theory. Critical pedagogy challenged me to interrogate the power dynamics in secondary music education and to question how I engaged with Years 7 and 8 students and the Victorian music curriculum. Concurrently, affect theory guided me to view the emotional/affective aspects of teaching and learning. It offered a critical lens through which to understand how my emotional reactions to educational situations shaped classroom dynamics and created and maintained boundaries among students, their parents, colleagues and me. In other words, my emotional reactions are not merely personal feelings or private matters but collective political forces (Ahmed, 2014a).

Drawing on my thinking, informed by critical pedagogy and affect theory, I provide an understanding of how my emotional responses (to educational situations), positionality, and power dynamics in the classroom space were integrated within secondary music education. Thinking within these two theoretical frameworks guided my inquiry questions, encouraging me to contemplate how my emotional responses and my implementation of internalised hegemonic Western classical music traditions and formal pedagogical approaches (e.g., reading and writing music notation) shaped my teaching and my students' learning with music education.

Unpacking Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a theory, philosophy and practice (Luitel et al., 2022) that aims to achieve social justice through education. This approach challenges the traditional teaching method known as the ‘banking model of education’ (Freire, 2005), which is often associated with the industrial model of education (Giroux, 2016; May, 2011). In the banking model, education is viewed as a process in which knowledge is deposited into students, who are expected to accept an unquestionable authority that dictates absolute truth as well as what is right and wrong (Giroux, 2020; Pinar, 2019, 2023). In contrast, critical pedagogy encourages students to learn to ‘read the word and the world’ around them (Freire, 2005; Tilley-Lubbs, 2018) as part of “a broader concern for renewing the struggle for social justice and democracy” (Giroux, 2020, p. 141). For Freire (1985), education is “an act of knowing” (p. 18), and reading words is an integral part of this act. Further, the act of reading cannot be explained as merely reading words, since “every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the *world* and a subsequent re-reading of the *world*” (Freire, 1985, p. 18). In other words, it is impossible to read words (or texts) without also reading the context of the words (or world).

Critical pedagogy educates students to take action against socioeconomic and political oppression by fostering conscientisation—that is, developing critical consciousness through reflexivity, which involves rigorous self-reflection (Adams et al., 2021). Thus, critical pedagogy is described as “a conscientious act arising from a deep awareness of students’ situatedness” (Giroux, 2020, p. 186). Critical pedagogy examines how education can either perpetuate or challenge systems of oppression (Apple, 2019; Giroux, 2020). It views education as a powerful tool for liberation and emancipation, but only when it is used to engage critically with social (public) issues connected to personal (private) experiences.

Apple (2004, 2019) critiqued the role of education and its function as an active agent in the social reproduction of knowledge and power. Asserting that schools unequally serve social classes, he contended that hegemonic culture is preserved and distributed by schools, that it is not politically neutral, and that schools benefit certain social classes, disadvantaging or marginalising others

(Apple, 2004; Aubrey & Riley, 2024). For example, teaching to read and write music notation and to gain advanced performance techniques for playing Western classical music on instruments represents a form of privileged, legitimising cultural capital, accessible only to certain students (Bates, 2021; Wright, 2015).

Cultural Capital, Neoliberal Influences in Music Education

Bourdieu (1984, 1986) identified cultural capital as existing in three forms: embodied (e.g., language, accent, taste in fashion, music, food, and manners or etiquette), objectified (e.g., [text]books, prints, and musical instruments), and institutionalised (e.g., academic credentials such as degrees and certificates). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) notion of cultural capital, Apple (2004) argued that schools contribute to the reproduction of social stratification and hierarchies by enabling unequal access to privileged knowledge for some students while excluding others (Rorty, 1989; Teese, 2013). This unequal distribution of cultural capital functions as a complex filter, reinforcing social inequality. Cultural capital is unequally distributed in society, predominantly shaped by the existing division of labour and power structures. Schools participate in reproducing this power distribution by valuing certain embodied, objectified, and institutionalised cultural capital over others. In other words, schools process not only knowledge but also people (Apple, 2004, 2019).

Schools often privilege a situated capital, which tends to be more accessible to students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. Students who already possess embodied cultural capital (e.g., the ability to read and write music notation and perform Western classical music with advanced techniques), objectified cultural capital (e.g., access to private music lessons and musical instruments), and/or institutionalised cultural capital (e.g., certificates serving as a gatekeeper for access to higher education and formal training that leads to prestigious occupations) are more likely to succeed in school music education. In contrast, students who lack these forms of cultural capital may be disadvantaged and marginalised. Schools contribute to the reproduction of social stratification and hierarchies by validating the advantages already held by those with access to cultural capital. In this sense, privileged

knowledge is processed with a complex filter of formal and informal knowledge, encompassing elite and popular culture (e.g., listening to Western classical music versus popular music, or reading and writing music notation to play a piece versus copying recordings by ear (Green, 2002)).

Apple (2012, 2019) and Giroux (1985, 2020, 2022) contended that education departments are influenced by neoliberal ideologies, which undervalue public education in favour of market-oriented (or profit-oriented and technical) skills to enhance competitiveness and employability in the global economy (Giroux, 2020; Pinar, 2019). As neoliberal education's central goal has become the prioritisation of economic growth, its focus has shifted to easily measurable outcomes (e.g., test scores) through high-stakes testing such as NAPLAN and PISA (Apple, 2004). The focus on easily measurable outcomes dramatically limited pedagogical approaches (Savage, 2017), which led subjects like the Arts (including music), regarded as difficult to measure, often being undervalued and marginalised (Ewing, 2020). The emphasis on high-stakes testing aligns with market-oriented, technical strategies, such as:

- ✚ commodification, where knowledge, information and education are perceived as commodities (Kauppinen, 2014);
- ✚ standardisation of curricula and tests or exams; and
- ✚ conformity that equips students to reproduce knowledge (Giroux, 2020).

These three approaches reduce teacher autonomy and shift their role from intellectuals to mere specialised technicians or installers focused on teaching to test (Giroux, 1985; Pinar, 2019). This is compatible with Pinar's (2019) assertion that politicians and profiteers made "the commonsensical argument that all that matters is 'the bottom line' (e.g., scores on the standardised tests) and in the process, the school is converted into a business ... not an educational institution" (p. 105).

Neoliberal influences on education diminish its transformative potential and turn it into a tool for social control through the distribution of cultural capital in the classroom. Freire (2005), Apple (2019) and Giroux (2020) have highlighted the importance of supporting students in developing critical consciousness (conscientisation) and understanding the role of education in

shaping their view of the world. This can be fulfilled through a dialogic approach, problem-posing education, and a praxis that involves a continuous cycle of reflection and action by the educator (Freire, 2005).

Thinking with Critical Pedagogy

In writing and analysing personal narratives (I discuss this process in detail in the methodology chapter), I employed Jackson and Mazzei's (2011, 2023) notion of thinking with theory. This notion challenges long-held traditional forms of qualitative data analysis, such as thematic analysis and coding. Thinking with theory seeks to push back against traditional data analysis that attempts to simplify and transparentise what is complex and multilayered (Marn, 2015). Drawing on thinking with critical pedagogy, I endeavoured to examine the interplay between two spaces/aspects of educational practice: the macro (the Victorian music curriculum and educational policies) and the micro (my personal approach to this curriculum and my pedagogical choices). Through this approach, I was able to deconstruct the power dynamics in secondary music education; more specifically, the relationship between those at the centre (who determine what knowledge is valuable) and those at the periphery (who are marginalised, including students from minority backgrounds and those with diverse cultural and/or linguistic experiences) (Apple, 2004).

As both a researcher and a participant in this inquiry, I reflexively interrogated my embodied positioning in relation to my students, their parents, and colleagues, to recognise the privilege and marginalisation witnessed and experienced. Positionality requires acknowledging my background and social location (including gender, class, race, ethnicity, education and geographic location), and the power dynamics between me, my students and my colleagues (Tilley-Lubbs, 2018). For instance, I have been privileged by the education I have received in Korea and Australia. This has included formal training in reading and writing musical notation, analysing harmony and melody, and engaging with Western classical and church music (influenced by my Christian upbringing). As a classroom music teacher, through focusing on reading and writing musical notation, analysing harmony and melody, and obtaining advanced performance techniques as the most valuable form of

musical knowledge, I positioned myself at the centre of authority. In contrast to my privileged position in music education, my identity as a female migrant from a minority cultural background in Australia, speaking English as a second language, positioned me in a marginalised, peripheral space.

Positioning myself as both privileged and marginalised (being at the centre while existing on the periphery) has given me distinctive perspectives on the power dynamics within secondary music education. As I critically reflected on my teaching practices, I recognised that I had emphasised the technical aspects (drawing on the aesthetic value) of music, which is reading and writing music notation, analysing harmony and melody, and performing Western classical pieces on the piano. By believing these skills to be the most valuable and legitimate forms of musical knowledge (Apple, 2019), I was unconsciously taking part in reproducing the distribution of power within music education. For example, at a Victorian state secondary school where I worked in 2013, only some students had access to what I considered valuable and legitimate musical knowledge. These students possessed the ability to read and/or write music notation and perform Western classical music (embodied cultural capital) or had access to private music lessons and musical instruments (objectified cultural capital). In consequence, students who lacked these forms of cultural capital may have found themselves disadvantaged in my classroom. This realisation (or conscientisation) encouraged me to explore the ways in which cultural traditions dominated the music curriculum and pedagogies. I questioned the hegemonic position of Western classical music and formal pedagogical approaches (e.g., reading and writing music notation). Throughout this process, I continually questioned who benefited most and who was disadvantaged by my teaching practices, contemplating how power dynamics in the music class were either perpetuated or challenged by my choice of pedagogical approaches.

Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy

Re-reading my teaching and learning experiences through thinking with critical pedagogy helped me recognise that my view of the purpose of music education is closely aligned with Rendon's (2009) notion of Sentipensante (sensing/thinking) pedagogy, which focuses on harmonising thought

(intellectual) with feeling (emotional). This alignment highlights my shifted and transformed view that music education is/can be:

- ✚ an act of love (Darder, 2020; Metcalfe & Game, 2016)
- ✚ resistance (Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2022)
- ✚ about creating and providing an inclusive classroom space where every student and teacher feels seen, heard and valued regardless of their sociocultural background (Rendoñ, 2009)

For example, my students and I can both be musically vulnerable by opening up and sharing our musical preferences within an emotionally safe and culturally responsive learning space. In doing so, we can also respect each other's cultural expressions and musical backgrounds. I may provide music lessons that connect with students' lived experiences, both inside and outside of school, to create a learning space that celebrates diverse musical and cultural expressions. This approach resists and challenges the prioritisation of Western classical traditions in the music classroom and pushes back against the banking model of education, where privileged knowledge (e.g., reading and writing music notation) is deposited into students (Freire, 2005).

Unpacking Affect Theory

In the past thirty years, scholars in anthropology, cultural studies and sociology have extensively interrogated the notion of affect, leading to a broad conceptualisation (Lenters, 2023). While affect and emotions are often used interchangeably (Ngai, 2004), many affect theorists (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Ingraham, 2023; Massumi, 1995; Probyn, 2005; Shaviro, 2016; Shouse, 2005) have argued that it is crucial to distinguish affect from emotions. For example, feelings can be understood as personal and biographical sensations labelled through prior personal experience, while emotions are social displays or projections of these feelings (Gorton, 2007; Ingraham, 2023; Shouse, 2005). Affect, in contrast, refers to unconscious, prelinguistic, non-intentional, and “pre-personal intensities corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act” (Massumi, 1987, p. xvi). In other words, affect is a raw,

immediate body response, such as facial expression, respiration, blood flow, posture, muscle tension, and vocalisations (Demos, 1995; Shouse, 2005), that arises before feelings are processed, labelled, and linked to potential actions (Massumi, 1995). Gregg and Seigworth (2010) also explained affect as an intensity, defining it as the visceral forces that exist beyond conscious knowing [or, awareness] that can serve to “drive us toward movement, thought, and extension” (p. 1).

Ahmed, unlike Massumi and other affect theorists, rejected the distinction between affect and emotions. She clearly expressed that she is interested not just in how the body “affects and is affected—thereby expressing a bodily responsiveness to the world ... but in how certain kinds of things are given value over time” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 97). In her work, *Affective Economies*, Ahmed (2004) explored how emotions function as social and political forces. The term ‘affective economies’ refers to the “doing, binding, and ordering work that emotions do in society” (Bazinet & Van Vliet, 2020, p. 47). In this sense, Ahmed conceptualised emotions as forces that align and engage both subjects and objects. Furthermore, she argued that the world we describe is messy and that creating a clear distinction between affect and emotions could lead us to lose our connection to that world (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). For her, affect is “what sticks [attaches], or what sustains and preserves the connection between ideas, values, objects and bodies” (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 230-231).

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2014a) explained how affects/emotions circulate between bodies and spaces. She developed this perspective by critiquing two ways of thinking about emotions: the inside-out (psychological) model, where emotions are viewed as interior possessions (e.g., I cry or laugh); and the outside-in (contagion) model, where feelings are transmitted between people (e.g., we cry or laugh together [having “fellow-feeling” (Denzin, 1984, p. 148)], or I cry but you laugh [feeling alienated from each other]). Both models assume “an objective distinction between inside and outside, the individual and the social, the ‘me’ and the ‘we’” (Ahmed, 2014a, p. 9). Rather, emotions can be “read in the social world [including a certain critical engagement with it] through the way they stick together objects, discourses, practices, and subject positions” (Morrison, 2020, p. 152). To rephrase, Ahmed focused on what emotions do and how they circulate rather than what they are

(Gorton, 2007). For her, “emotions are not something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have; rather, it is how we respond to objects and others that surfaces or boundaries are made; the ‘I’ and ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (Ahmed, 2014a, p. 10). Drawing on this perspective, Ahmed elaborated on how emotions are not merely personal experiences or private matters but collective social and political forces that shape identities, relationships, and power dynamics. Following Ahmed, I view my emotions as active responses that emerge when interacting with the surrounding world, rather than merely feelings I have.

Thinking with Affect Theory

In her conversation with Sigrid Schmitz about different facets of emotions and affect and their relations to bodily sensations, Ahmed articulated that “there are worlds that are orientated towards some bodies more than others” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, pp. 100-101). Based on this articulation, Ahmed used the metaphor of *the comfortable chair* to illustrate how social and institutional structures and spaces accommodate certain bodies while excluding others. Ahmed explained that the comfortable chair is designed to “receive bodies that have already given that shape and impression to the world” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 101). Just as a body sitting in a chair leaves an impression, those who have occupied privileged/powerful positions shape social and institutional structures and spaces. In other words, society and institutions are often structured to accommodate privileged/powerful groups and create boundaries between them and disadvantaged or marginalised groups. This understanding of how certain bodies shape social and institutional structures and spaces has helped contextualise the role emotions play in negotiating the Victorian music curriculum within the broader frameworks of power dynamics, privilege, and marginalisation.

Drawing on thinking with affect theory, I explored how my position in music education (e.g., receiving formal music training and having access to higher education) and my emotional responses to educational situations had created a power dynamic of privilege that haunted the pedagogic space. Through analysing and interpreting specific educational situations (detailed later

in the next chapter), I began to see how the spectral presence of privilege (Vicars et al., 2025) was actively shaping how certain students in the music classroom were comfortably accommodated, while others were excluded and/or marginalised by my curricular and pedagogical choices that favoured the Western classical music traditions over others.

I recognised that my emotional responses in teaching music to Years 7 and 8 students at the Victorian state school in 2013 were shaping the classroom space. The space comfortably accommodated certain students who had access to embodied cultural capital (e.g., the ability to read and write music notation) or objectified cultural capital (e.g., private music lessons and instruments), while making others who lacked that cultural capital feel excluded. For instance, my emotional responses during the end-of-year school concert illuminated how deeply I had internalised Western classical music traditions. I felt frustrated when I observed students and their parents, as audience members, not adhering to what I considered proper concert etiquette. They clapped at the wrong time, dressed inappropriately for the concert, did not turn off their mobile phones, and did not remain quiet throughout the performance. My frustration became attached to inappropriate clothing and noisy conversations, marking those individuals as displaying an ‘unacceptable concert manner’. At the same time, my sense of appreciation became attached to (semi-)formal attire and ‘proper concert manners’. These emotional associations contributed to and reinforced the creation of boundaries between audience members: those who showed proper concert manners and those who did not.

I felt frustrated and unhappy when I discovered that some parents could not afford the music textbook due to financial constraints. My initial reaction revealed the perspective I had formed based on my own educational experience: that all parents or guardians should purchase textbooks for all subjects. Regrettably, I did not hide how I felt from my students. I view that my disapproval was making the classroom space less welcoming for students from low socioeconomic and marginalised cultural backgrounds. As Ahmed’s comfortable chair metaphor illustrates, my reactions created and maintained boundaries between students who purchased all textbooks (including music) and those who did not or could not. My frustration about the music textbook not being purchased (more specifically, music being undervalued and marginalised

in school education) created boundaries: students with the music textbook were labelled as 'motivated and engaged', while those without it were labelled as 'unmotivated and disengaged'.

Reading my experiences with 'thinking with affect theory', I began to comprehend how my emotional reactions towards students and their parents circulated between bodies and classroom space, reinforcing power dynamics and social inequalities based on socioeconomic status, cultural background, and access to Western musical traditions as forms of cultural capital. This conscientisation is in harmony with what Ahmed (2014a) argued that emotions are not merely personal feelings but collective political forces. My emotional responses actively created, maintained and shaped boundaries between those who could access certain forms of musical knowledge and those who could not or did not. These boundaries affected the ways my students experienced music in their secondary school education and how they may have come to see themselves as motivated/engaged or unmotivated/disengaged individuals, just as the impression of a comfortable chair can determine who is comfortable and welcomed and who is excluded in institutional spaces.

Chapter 4. Methodology: Composing the Inquiry

This study, drawing on post-qualitative inquiry, embraces Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2021b) concept of *refusal of method* to challenge what she termed the conventional humanist qualitative methodology (St. Pierre, 2021a)—that is, the method-driven approach in which qualitative researchers “write objective accounts of field experiences based on the positivist scientist paradigm” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 5). I also attempted to “produce knowledge differently and to produce different knowledge” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). In this context, writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2003) became essential. Through this approach, writing serves as a means of learning what I know (and do not know) while concurrently creating new knowledge during the process. This writing approach challenges the positive science paradigm, or Cartesian heritage (Aoki, 2004b), that considers writing as something that occurs after interviews are conducted, observations are completed, and data are analysed/interpreted. More explicitly, writing in the positivist science paradigm is viewed as a mere tool for reporting findings or pre-existing knowledge in the form of a polished final text (Denzin et al., 2024; Richardson, 2003; St. Pierre, 2021a, 2021b).

The methodology centres on a bricolage of highly-personal, introspective and analytical approaches that include autoethnography. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) defined bricolage as “a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (p. 45). This methodological approach is focused on the self: my own experiences, story, and the way I have constructed a narrative of my life to make meaning. Denzin et al. (2024) described qualitative research as “a set of interpretive activities” (p. 17) that does not privilege any single methodological approach over another. Instead, it encourages integrating and combining various approaches, enabling researchers to draw on multiple disciplines and methodological approaches. This flexibility creates a richer, more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of human experiences. Similarly, Grossberg et al. (1992) argued that qualitative research spans across multiple disciplines (interdisciplinary), integrates different knowledge and methods (transdisciplinary), and, at times,

challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries (counter-disciplinary). Therefore, qualitative research methodological practices are viewed as “soft science, journalism, ethnography, bricolage, quilt making or montage” (Denzin et al., 2024, p. 16). Finding resonance with Denzin et al.’s (2024) and Grossberg et al.’s (1992) perspectives, I positioned myself as an interpretive bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) who constructs meaning and makes sense of myself and my teaching and learning experiences through a bricolage of autobiographical, narrative and life history approaches. Multimodal elements, such as background music, were integrated into this inquiry to challenge the academy’s traditional form of knowledge production (e.g., written text). Written texts in academic knowledge have been privileged as the primary communication medium (Doyle & Cuthill, 2015; Literat et al., 2018). Thus, introducing and integrating multimodal elements disrupts this text-based knowledge and expands epistemology by providing multiple ways of knowing.

Central to this inquiry is critical autoethnography, which combines autoethnography and critical pedagogy (detailed in the theoretical frameworks chapter). In this study, critical autoethnography served as a lens through which I explored my positionality, pedagogical approaches and curriculum content choices while teaching music to junior secondary students. Aligning with this methodological approach, Pinar’s (1994) *carrere* method, a process of autobiographical reflection, enabled the reconstruction, analysis and interpretation of my personal narratives. The application of critical autoethnography and *carrere* enabled me to explore how I negotiated the Victorian music curriculum to engage junior secondary students in music education and to situate my teaching and learning experiences within a broader sociocultural and educational context by intertwining autobiographical, narrative, and life-history approaches. Lastly, I utilised Jackson and Mazzei’s (2011, 2023) notion of thinking with theory—that is, the notion that challenges traditional forms of qualitative data analysis like thematic analysis and coding, which attempt to simplify what is complex and multilayered (Marn, 2015)—to acknowledge the complexity and multilayered nature of my life experience, which cannot be simply coded or themed.

This methodology chapter is structured into five sections. The first section articulates how this study is situated within the post-qualitative inquiry.

The second section explores the foundational concept of critical autoethnography and rethinks the notion of 'I' from stable identity to fluid subjectivity. It also explains how this autoethnographic study functions as a narrative and life history inquiry. The third section details the use of Pinar's (1994) *carrere* as a framework for creating and analysing personal narratives. The fourth section shows how narrative analysis is integrated with thinking with critical pedagogy and affect theory. The final section addresses ethical considerations.

Situating Within the Post-Qualitative Inquiry

In this inquiry, I have attempted to write an autobiographical account through what has been termed *the final moment of qualitative research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Qualitative research has evolved through at least eleven historical moments, which overlap and converge simultaneously in the present (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Denzin et al., 2024). These historical moments, as explained by Denzin et al. (2024), span from the traditional (1900-1950), the modernist (1950-1970), blurred genres (1970-1980), the paradigm wars (1980-1985), the crisis of representation (1986-1990), the postmodern (1990-1995), post-experimental inquiry (1995-2000), the methodologically contested present (2000-2010), paradigm proliferation (2005-2010), the fractured, post-humanist turn (2010-2015), and the uncertain, utopian future-present (2016-present), where "critical inquiry finds its voice in the public arena" (p. 12).

In light of these evolving, converging and overlapping moments, I drew on the notion of refusal of method (St. Pierre, 2021a), a stance opposed in the 1980s and 90s with the "crisis of representation and postmodern turn" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 42). This turn contested the assumption of scientific positivism that "truth can transcend personal opinion, bias [and experiences]" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 40). This led to the post-experimental moment of qualitative research that has been defined in part by a concern for storytelling, for composing ethnographies in new ways, and for the advent of post-foundational research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this post-experimental moment, qualitative researchers moved past traditional forms of representation

and explored various creative methods such as poetry and performative texts.

This inquiry is closely linked to the post-experiential moment, as I attempted to produce knowledge in a different way (St. Pierre, 1997). In ‘the methodologically contested moment’, Denzin (2001), drawing on the scholarship of Haraway, claimed that “there is no longer a God’s eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty” (p. 325); every research reflects the researcher’s standpoint in the social sciences. Thus, qualitative research is called for “examining the new ways of making the practices of critical qualitative inquiry central to the workings of a free democratic society” (Denzin, 2001, p. 325).

Autoethnography: A Methodological Framework

In his article, *The Primacy of Experience and The Politics of Method*, Eisner (1988) claimed that knowledge is a posteriori, derived from human experience as “people are recognised as being active agents in the reproduction and transformation of social life” (Wall, 2012, p. 319). This claim aligns with Lyotard’s (1984) critical insight that knowledge cannot be discovered as an absolute truth; rather, it is shaped by individual and collective human experience. Similarly, Aoki (2004a) and Doll Jr. (1993) argued for the emphasis on discovering, and Haraway (1988) has asserted that knowledge production occurs through a conversation with the world, suggesting that knowledge is produced from being positioned and situated within the social, cultural, and physical contexts of the knower.

The arguments presented by Eisner (1988), Lyotard (1984), Doll Jr. (1993), Aoki (2004a) and Haraway (1988) align with this inquiry in two ways. First, I endeavoured to produce knowledge derived from the interplay between my personal teaching and learning experiences and the institutional structures and power dynamics in secondary music education. Second, this inquiry aimed to “describe and systematically analyse” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 257) my lived experiences, which is a characteristic of autoethnography, to understand how my view of the purpose of secondary music education has shifted. My view shifted from the ‘curriculum-as-plan’ (drawing on Reimer’s (1989b) notion of music education as an appreciation of music’s aesthetic development) to

curriculum-as-lived-experiences (inspired by Allsup's (2016) open philosophy and Rendon's (2009) *Sentipensante* pedagogy). These perspectives advocate an inclusive educational space where everyone, including students and teachers, feels seen, heard and valued.

These shifts, from curriculum-as-plan to curriculum-as-lived-experiences, resonate with Pinar's (2019) concept of curriculum theory, which focuses on exploring and understanding personal experiences and meanings within the social and cultural realities that individuals face through self-reflection (Pinar, 1994). Curriculum theory poses a central question: What knowledge is of most worth? (Pinar, 2019). This question invokes an answer that is inherently shaped by subjectivity, society, and historical contexts, encouraging us to discern

what is at stake, not only for us as teachers and students, but as citizens struggling to survive in the politically polarised, economically unequal society at this dangerous techno-authoritarian historical moment. (Pinar, 2019, p. 115)

Pinar (2019) argued that curriculum is not only “political but also racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological and international” (p. 107). He questioned why the school curriculum does not encourage students to reflect on themselves critically and the world they inhabit (Pinar, 2019). By engaging in a dialogic encounter and self-reflection in teaching and learning experiences—what Pinar (2019) referred to as “a complicated conversation that is curriculum” (p. vii)—we can study how our experiences have shaped us and discover that “we are subjectively structured like autobiography” (Pinar, 2019, p. 6). This perspective aligns with what Freire (2005) advocated for in his critical pedagogy, which supports students to think critically, recognising social injustices and taking action to change their circumstances through problem-posing education, a dialogic approach and praxis, a continuous cycle of reflection and action to foster students' critical awareness.

Drawing on Pinar's curriculum theory, intertwined with Freire's critical pedagogy (and Ahmed's affect theory), I explored the interplay between my choices of music curriculum content and pedagogical approaches (micro) and

the broader power dynamics within secondary music education (macro) when (re-)reading my teaching and learning experiences in the form of personal narratives. In other words, I examined how these two aspects of educational practice (the micro and macro linkages) interacted while reflecting on my teaching and learning experiences through personal narratives (Laslett, 1999).

In attempting to describe and analyse my personal experiences (Ellis et al., 2011), a critical affective autoethnographic approach enabled me to examine how my pedagogical approaches (micro), which have been shaped by years of formal music training and classroom interactions with my students and colleagues, intersect with broader sociocultural power dynamics in music in secondary education (macro). For example, my experience of employing traditional teaching approaches (e.g., prioritising reading musical notation, analysing harmony and melody, and obtaining advanced performance techniques) and expressing my frustration with students' and their parents' inappropriate concert etiquette in the institutional space, become more than my personal experience and feelings; they are a collective political force (Ahmed, 2014a). By "turning into the ethnographic gaze inward on myself and outward on the larger context wherein my personal experience occurred" (Denzin, 1997, p. 227), I critically analysed/interpreted how I interacted with my students, their parents and colleagues, and how I created boundaries between us. This enabled me to understand how my view of the purpose of secondary music education shifted and evolved. Starr (2010) highlighted this process, noting that "autoethnography provides a framework that bridges the tensions between personal/social, theoretical/practical, and the self/other to highlight personal experience and the struggle within it" (p. 2).

Numerous scholars have argued that autoethnography's diverse forms and creative representations make it challenging to define precisely (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Therefore, it is essential to clarify how autoethnography is understood in the context of this inquiry. Adams et al. (2021) explained that "autoethnography consists of three characteristics or activities: 'auto' (self), 'ethno' (culture) and 'graphy' (representation/writing/story)" (p. 3). In other words, autoethnography combines "the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography" (Ellis et al., 2011, p.

275), given that authors of autoethnographic accounts selectively and retrospectively write about their personal experiences (autobiography) to explore cultural practices (ethnography) (Pelias, 2022). This autobiographical genre of writing and research displays “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the culture” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Through this multi-layered approach, my personal experiences were woven into the social world through cultural and critical analysis, revealing how my teaching and learning experiences shape and are shaped by sociocultural-political forces (Ahmed, 2014a; Ellis, 2004). In this regard, I view autoethnography as research, writing, storytelling, a process of inquiry (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Pelias, 2022), and a philosophy (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), which bridges tensions between personal, sociocultural, and political aspects of human experiences and the struggles within it (Ellis et al., 2011; Starr, 2010). This view aligns with Spry’s (2001) argument that autoethnography functions as a “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social context” (p. 710).

As a methodological framework, autoethnography enabled me to be both the author and the focus of this inquiry, “the one who tells the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and created” (Ellis, 2016, p. 3). Positioned at the intersection of the personal and cultural, I acted as both an ethnographer who observes and interprets, and a storyteller who writes and describes my teaching and learning experiences (Ellis, 2016). In other words, I used my personal, lived experiences to explore cultural and social phenomena (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Edwards, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011; Gannon, 2022; Pelias, 2022).

As a process of inquiry and its product (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020a; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011), autoethnography offered me a unique standing point, through which I, as an inquirer, delved into my personal, lived experiences and the relationship to culture (Ellis, 2004). Beyond the proposed definitions and characteristics of autoethnography, Sikes (2022) asserted that the most important warrant for autoethnography has been Charles Wright Mills’ (2000) articulation to social scientists to employ the *sociological imagination*, urging them to use their life experiences in their intellectual work and continue to examine and interpret them to prompt transformational change.

Re-Positioning the Self

Several scholars have encouraged researchers to produce autoethnographic accounts that adopt a critical lens (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b; Holman Jones, 2016; Marx et al., 2017; Tilley-Lubbs, 2016).

These scholars explained that by combining autobiography, ethnography and critical pedagogy, researchers become participants in their study, “turning an inward gaze to examine the self and the complexities of cultural perspectives through the lens of critical pedagogy” (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016, p. 3). This is in harmony with what Boylorn and Orbe (2020b) argued: critical autoethnography is concerned with “culture and power, construction and theorisations of cultural identities, intersectionality and social inequalities” (p. 6). Additionally, Wall (2008) articulated that autoethnographic writing can address theoretical debates in contemporary sociology, such as “macro and micro linkage, structural and agentic relationships, and social reproduction and social change” (p. 39).

Reflecting on these arguments, I began to examine how the power dynamics (or the structural relationships) between me as a music teacher and my students, their parents, and colleagues in the classroom were unconsciously reproducing a power distribution within music education through my prioritisation of reading music notation. More specifically, this critical autoethnographic inquiry aimed to produce evocative personal narratives that examine cultural criticism and intersectionality, “exploring how multiple aspects of identities are simultaneously manifested within interactions with others” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b, p. 7).

Following these perspectives, this inquiry is situated within the critical autoethnography, which is also “evocative, performative, reflexive, political, cultural, analytic and theoretical” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b, p. 6).

Utilising critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework in this autoethnographic inquiry, I interrogated my positionality within the privilege and marginalisation I have experienced (e.g., both as having access to privileged knowledge and being a member of a cultural minority background). These interrogations resulted in “the collision of discourse and self-awareness [or reflexivity] with larger cultural assumptions concerning ethnicity, nationality, gender, and class” (Spry, 2001, p. 711). This interrogation is compatible with what Starr (2010) has noted: autoethnography (as a methodology) draws on Freire’s (2005) conscientisation, involving an “individual becoming aware of

one's position and creating a space to change the perception of the resultant reality" (p. 1). Hence, autoethnography is a study of the space between self and culture that engages the individual in experiences that cultivate "an authentic cycle of action based on reflection, and reflection based on action" (Blackburn, 2000, p. 7).

In *Writing Autoethnography*, Pelias (2022) stated that "the self, as always situated culturally, becomes an exploratory tool as well as an affective and cognitive opening for cultural and critical inquiry" (p. 124). Similarly, Conquergood (1985) argued that autoethnography aims to "produce a creative yet critical articulation of lived experiences in a textual performance" (p. 9), in which diverse views of experience enter into conversations (Johnson, 2022).

In explaining the definition and characteristics of autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner (2000, 2020) suggested a wide array of labels, such as autobiographical ethnography, critical autobiography, lived experience, narrative ethnography, personal narratives, writing-stories, critical autoethnography, queer autoethnography, performative autoethnography, and evocative autoethnography. They emphasised that these labels are descriptions, not prescriptions. In addition, Boylorn and Orbe (2020b) claimed that autoethnography is not either/or; it is both/and. Thus, autoethnography is both "critical, evocative, performative and reflexive, political and cultural, analytic and theoretical" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b, p. 6). Boylorn and Orbe's (2020b) argument on the multifaceted understanding of autoethnography aligns with post-qualitative inquiry approaches, particularly with St. Pierre's (2021a) concept of refusal of method. In this study, I endeavoured to "produce knowledge [my personal narratives] differently and produce different knowledge" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175) by incorporating multimodal elements (e.g., background music and images) and producing evocative personal stories. This challenges conventional qualitative methodology (St. Pierre, 2021a), in which qualitative researchers write objective accounts base on the positivist science paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Autoethnography and Narrative Inquiry

Holman Jones et al. (2013, as cited in Denzin, 2014) defined autoethnography as "the use of personal experience and personal writing to: critique cultural

practices, contribute to existing research [or knowledge], embrace [the author's] vulnerability with purpose, and create a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel [emotional] response" (p. 15). Reed-Danahay (1997) and Spry (2001) elaborated, arguing that autoethnographic writing is both an interdisciplinary process and text that constructs a self-narrative whose "purpose is to reflexively critique the situatedness of self in relation to others" in social construction (Starr, 2010, p. 2). The construction of narrative in itself has been argued to be a form of analysing, interpreting and finding meaning, aligned with Richardson's (2003) notion of 'writing as a method of inquiry', and the first step in "locating the [social] tensions and unspoken silences in one's life" (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 23).

In this inquiry, I reflexively examined my positioning as a secondary music teacher in relation to my students, their parents, and colleagues, and explicitly acknowledged the privilege and marginalisation I have experienced—that is, being at the centre of authority in the music classroom while existing in the periphery as a migrant from a minority cultural background—writing about it in the form of personal narratives. Personal narratives, as they are situated, fall under the umbrella of autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2020; Wall, 2008, 2012), and are seen as "stories about authors who view themselves as the [social and cultural] phenomenon" and "write evocative narratives specifically focused on their personal lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 279). Narratives are often used interchangeably with the word stories and serve as powerful tools for making sense of the world and constructing knowledge. Aligned with Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge, which proposes that knowledge is constructed from being positioned and situated within the social, cultural, and physical contexts of the knower or writer, writing my personal narratives enabled me to glimpse the sense I made overtly so that I can and will continue to "examine, critique and revise that sense" (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 23).

It has been argued that personal narratives provide rich insights into human experience. Personal narratives can "invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, pp. 279-280). In other words, personal narratives encourage readers to engage emotionally (and intellectually), and

invite them to reflect on their own experiences. Further, Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocated for the use of (personal) narratives as a source of empowerment and a form of resistance, which can “counter the domination and authority of canonical discourse” (p. 749). In this context, self-reflexivity in the autoethnographic text is viewed as “a courageous act of unpacking our own biases and linguistic choices as they connect to larger systems of power” (Johnson, 2022, p. 150). In support of these perspectives, I argue that my personal narratives, rooted in my unique positionality, can counter other narratives that reflect dominant discourses and power structures that are tightly connected to academic gatekeeping (Doungphummes et al., 2025).

Ellis and Bochner’s (2000) and Doungphummes et al.’s (2025) arguments are compatible with Sikes (2022), who has noted:

doing autoethnography [or writing personal narratives] can be invoked as a challenge to traditional, hegemonic, imposed power imbalances because it offers a space wherein the researchers can critically and reflexively reflect on their experiences and enables researchers to speak for themselves rather than through intermediaries, which has usually been the case in traditional qualitative and social science approaches. (p. 25)

Thus, writing personal narratives can challenge critiques from the positivist scientist paradigm, which refers to autoethnography as a form of “me-research and soft-research” that is ungeneralisable and self-absorbed (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020b, p. 10). This critique emerged within the conventional notions of what constitutes scientific scholarship and knowledge production (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Drawing on Eisner (1988), Lyotard (1984) and Haraway (1988), knowledge cannot be discovered as an absolute truth, it is shaped by human experience, positioned and situated within sociocultural and physical contexts. My stories of practice cannot be “measured on anyone’s scale”, and my lived experience is to be encountered as “a construct mediated by culture, context, history and language” (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 16).

In this inquiry, I chose to tell stories of my teaching and learning

experiences as they reveal how I, as a secondary music teacher, understood my shifting and evolving view of music education's purpose: the Victorian curriculum. This is what Aoki (2004c) termed curriculum-as-lived-experiences (creating a socially inclusive and culturally responsive learning space that provides creativity and exploration) (Allsup, 2016), as opposed to curriculum-as-plan (the intrinsic value that focuses on the music's aesthetic development and appreciations) (Reimer, 1989b). My personal narratives also helped me make sense of my experiences of teaching music to students in low socioeconomic state urban schools in Melbourne, Australia (Loughran, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1995). Through the telling my stories, I have been able to reflect on the broader socio-cultural-political narratives of music education that overlap with my life (Polkinghorne, 1988) and were woven into the fabric of a wider musical culture that informs my pedagogy (Patton, 2015). In this sense, my narrative-self is "the internalised and evolving story I construct to explain how I came to be the person I am becoming" (McAdams, 2016, p. 34).

Rethinking the 'I': From Stable Identity to Fluid Subjectivity

In the process of writing my personal narratives, I endeavoured to provide a synopsis of my teaching and learning experience that is "organised in part chronologically and in part conceptually" (Wall, 2008, p. 46). My personal narratives engaged with theoretical debates (Wall, 2012), such as micro and macro linkages (my personal pedagogical approaches to the Victorian music curriculum), power dynamics and my positionality (being at the centre of authority in the music classroom while existing in the periphery as a migrant from a minority cultural background), and social and cultural reproduction and change (my participation in the reproduction of power distribution within music education by prioritising music notation). In this sense, autoethnography is not a simple story of 'I'. Wyatt and Gale (2013) observed that "[they] fear autoethnographic writing as tearing a line through stability" (p. 302). Their arguments suggest that autoethnographic, reflexive writing can challenge our sense of self or identity, which is associated with a traditional humanistic, enlightenment notion that sees the self as "rational, unified, singular, simple, and consciously self-chosen" (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 9). Sikes and Goodson (2016) have further explained that self or identity is a "contested and

controversial term” (p. 62) because it is uncertain to which self or identity we refer when discussing our private, public, professional, spiritual, or other selves. In other words, there are “multi-self-beings” (Sikes & Goodson, 2016, p. 62), and autoethnographic writing may unsettle how we define who we are, disrupting the narratives we created about ourselves and our life experiences. This reflexive writing process could provoke fear as it questions what we believe we (already) know.

Autoethnographic writing, in another sense, provides comfort by enabling authors to inhabit their stories with uncertainty (Spry, 2016). It encourages authors to view themselves not as processing a stable, unified and fixed identity but as embodying a fluid subjectivity—that is, a postmodern understanding of the individual as “socially constructed, complicated, fragmented, and contradictory” (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 10). Sikes (2022) argued that the autoethnographic way of life is rooted in uncertainty and doubt, as “to be alive is to be uncertain” (p. 24). Considering Spry’s (2016) and Sikes’ (2022) claims, I leaned into and embraced uncertainty while writing personal narratives. When I described, wrote, read, and analysed/interpreted my teaching and learning experiences through an ethnographic lens, I sometimes felt confused and uncertain about what I was doing. For instance, I questioned whether I was adequately applying Pinar’s (1994) *currenre* method—that is, an autobiographical reflection process that reconceptualises the field as a “complicated conversation” (Smith, 2013, p. 5)—to produce personal narratives. I was unsure whether I needed to follow all four steps of *currenre*, which are regressive, progressive, analytic and synthetic, linearly. The regressive step reflects on the past, the progressive step looks to the future, and the analytic and synthetic steps “attempt to understand the present” (Downey, 2019, p. 1). I questioned whether I needed to focus solely on the regressive step to examine an educational situation I experienced in the past, or whether the progressive, analytic, and synthetic steps could be integrated into it. For example, I considered whether to write about a past educational situation while reflecting on how I might act differently in a similar future scenario, analysing my present emotional state and exploring my current educational interests. I re-read Pinar’s explanation of *currenre* multiple times in both the original English and the Korean translation to clarify my understanding.

At other times, I was uncertain about whether I was expected to experience the emotions I had while writing and reading my narratives. For instance, I felt ashamed when reading a story about my emotional reactions (frustration and disapproval) towards students who could not purchase the music textbook due to their families' financial constraints. I realised that I had not considered my students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and I may have made them feel uncomfortable in the music classroom.

I also reflected on my efforts (such as teaching students musical literacy, including music notation) to prove the development of their literacy skills in music class so they could become successful competitors in the global economy. I believed that integrating literacy (by prioritising music notation) into music classes aligns with what the school and curriculum advises teachers to focus on to help students become successful competitors and employable global citizens (Giroux, 2020). This is because there was an expectation that I would also be touching on literacy and numeracy during my music lessons and that I would be required to report on this to the music faculty coordinator and the school principal. I realised that I had not created and provided a learning space that was socially and culturally inclusive (Allsup, 2016) or that empowered students to think critically and recognise social injustice (Freire, 2005). Love, care and respect were lacking in my music teaching actions (Darder, 2020; Metcalfe & Game, 2016), and boundaries were created between me as a teacher and the students (Ahmed, 2014a). As a result of the realisation through this conscientisation—that is, empowering students and teachers to take action against social, economic, and political oppression by developing critical consciousness through self-reflection—I needed a break from reading, writing and interpreting the story I was working on for a few days. I felt disappointed and ashamed of the way I reacted to my students about the music textbook. However, simultaneously, I could imagine creating a classroom space where my students would feel comfortable and valued in the future, regardless of their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Rendoñ, 2009). Through this imagined future, I felt relieved and glad to know there is hope, that I will help and support secondary and tertiary students to develop critical consciousness and the role of education in shaping their view of the world (Freire, 2005) by providing an

open space in which students would feel welcomed, accepted and valued.

This moment of conscientisation connected to the four steps of currere: I reflected on my past teaching experience (regressive), imagined how I might teach or act in the future (progressive), interpreted the narrative that I was writing through the lens of critical pedagogy and affect theory, feeling ashamed yet hopeful for the future (analytic), and concurrently considered what it means to be/come a music teacher and my evolving view of the purpose of music education (synthetic). I suddenly realised that working through the four steps of currere is a messy, non-linear process; time in currere operates recursively rather than linearly. Currere is marked by “a temporal dimension that is different from the school clock sense of time” (Wang & Flory, 2024, p. 9).

Furthermore, the writings of Ellis and Bochner (2000) reassured me that it is natural to experience emotions while writing an autoethnographic account. Writing personal narratives was therapeutic in this sense because I wrote to make sense of my lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). This aligns with Pinar (2019) explanation: the regression step, looking to the past, enables “recovery of repressed material, providing additional information for understanding the present one inhabits now” (p. 25).

Another moment of uncertainty was when my writing plan did not unfold as scheduled. Rather than following my planned narrative writing activity, I sometimes found myself deeply immersed in recalling specific moments of teaching experiences. This occurred as I read my written words and phrases, enabling me to write in a free-associative mode where certain words naturally guided my reflection and interpretation. For instance, when describing a composition task for Year 9 students at a Catholic school where I worked in 2010, reading some of my own writing unexpectedly brought back memories/moments of educational events at other Catholic and state secondary schools that I had forgotten. I remembered sitting at an upright piano in a small practice room, playing Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’. A group of Year 9 students listened in silence and eagerly requested more when the song ended. Their smiles, cheers, and applause filled the room, and more requests followed each song I performed.

Then, two other memories emerged. The first was me standing in the

music classroom of a Catholic P-12 college where I worked as a replacement music teacher for three weeks in 2009. There was a Yamaha piano in one of the music classrooms with some keys missing. The second memory was from a state secondary school, where 12 electric keyboards were available and only a few headsets for more than 24 students to share as they practised the chord progression of 'Hey Soul Sister' by Train. Despite the missing keys from the Yamaha piano in the music room of the Catholic P-12 college (from the first emerged memory) and limited resources at the state secondary school (from the second emerged memory), there were no complaints. Instead, the excitement of playing and listening to music filled the room. As I relived these memories, I suddenly felt nostalgic; a smile formed on my face. I had forgotten these memories of sharing those precious moments with students.

Remembering these moments became possible through reading my narratives, as reading can be "an act in which the reader encounters something unknown and is willing to let things arise as they will" (St. Pierre & Kuecker, 2024, p. 1574). By embracing uncertainty, which is reading and writing in a free association that guided my memory recollection and reflection instead of following the planned writing activity, I unexpectedly stumbled upon elements of my teaching experience that I had forgotten (Brinkmann, 2014; Pelosi, 2018). This aligns with Gannon's (2022) argument that the truth of experience "cannot be chronologically or rationally ordered when temporality is itself disjointed, and we are haunted by memories of time, places and events that repeatedly pressure the subject [with bodily affects]" (p. 44).

In this inquiry, I focused on my subjectivity rather than identity, following Vicars (2016) assertion that: "(auto)ethnographers must ask 'when, where, and how am I?', not 'who am I?' as a certain identity is never possible" (p. 447). Taking Vicars' (2016) argument into account, I focused on myself as a subject constituted and situated in two different languages and cultures (Bhabha, 1994; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). My fluid subjectivity exists within and through socially and culturally framed discourses that continuously circulate in the multiple stages and pages of my life. This notion of subjectivity (being in multiple stages of one's life) aligns with Deleuze and Parnet's (1987) reinterpretation of *haecceity*, which posits that "individuation is not of an

object nor of a person, but rather of an event” (p. 169). This concept, highlighting multiplicities, comprises ongoing transformations without a fixed history and individuation without a (defined) subject. This reinterpretation has an entirely different use and nature compared to its original use in the school of Duns Scotus, which described the individuation of beings, or *thisness*, the essence that makes each being uniquely itself (Deleuze, 1986). In this context, haecceity refers to “a being-multiple, instead of a being-one, a being-whole” (Deleuze, 1986, p. viii).

St. Pierre (2017) offered a comprehensive example of haecceity, explaining that her ontological dissonance became evident during interviews with 36 women from her rural hometown as part of an ethnographic study. St. Pierre (2017) articulated that it was challenging to determine ‘which women’ she interviewed: “a fragile, older, retired, dying female interviewee, or a young, vibrant Latin teacher that I [St. Pierre] used to admire as a student” (p. 690). She also struggled to reconcile her perspective: ‘a five-year-old’ who interpreted her hometown through a child’s eyes, with her role as ‘a middle-aged researcher’, with permission to investigate the lives of women in the small rural community. In line with Deleuze and Parnet’s (1987) and St. Pierre’s (2017) insights, I had difficulty separating my seven-year-old self from my middle-aged educator or inquirer self. As a child, I began learning songs on the piano and may have viewed the purpose of music education as mastering music notation and performing various pieces flawlessly. As a middle-aged educator or inquirer, I am classically trained yet advocate for a moral vision of music education that challenges traditional curricula focused solely on reproducing musical works and techniques, leaving little room for creativity (Allsup, 2016). Viewed as a fluid subjectivity rather than a stable identity, I asked myself how I define music education across my multiple selves at different ages and in various locations, with diverse life experiences and knowledge, and different positionalities. I found myself moving through all the times and places of my childhood and young adulthood in Korea, into a pre-service, early-career and experienced music teacher, and into the inquirer of this study in Australia. I have become imperceptible (a subjective without a stable, fixed identity), awaiting a different individuation to emerge. In this context, my telling moments exist not in sequence but in their immanence

(Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Therefore, this inquiry is and will be a “tentative and unfinished quality of an autoethnographic project” as I am precarious, always “in process and reconstituted anew” each time I write in shifting circulations (Gannon, 2022, p. 43).

Life History Inquiry

Drawing on the authorial voice of ‘I’ as storyteller, my inquiry aligns with Robert’s (2002) proposition that storytellers turn themselves into sociocultural structures of biographical individuals to tell their life stories. My interpretations of teaching/learning experiences throughout this study examine how my multiple selves, shaped by different knowledge and life experiences in different ages and places have influenced my view of (secondary) music education’s purpose and informed my choice of curriculum content and pedagogical approaches.

Goodson (2017a) added that life stories inhabit the heartland of subjectivity, which supports the position that my life stories are constructed subjectively and situated within my interpretation of experience, with an attention on fluid subjectivity rather than stable identity. Further interpretation may be added as another layer in the future, as I view myself as a fluid and precarious individual constantly “in process and reconstitute anew” each time I (re)read my narratives in shifting circulation (Gannon, 2022, p. 43). For instance, in the theoretical frameworks chapter, I discussed that by drawing on critical pedagogy and affect theory, I reflexively examined my positionality (e.g., being at the centre of authority in the music classroom while existing in the periphery as a migrant from a minority cultural background), and my emotional responses to educational events (e.g., my frustration with audience members’ concert etiquette, such as clapping at the wrong time and not remaining quiet throughout the performance) shaped power dynamics and boundaries within the institutional space. I experienced my frustration with students’ and their parents’ inappropriate concert etiquette, yet interpreted and produced this event differently as I exist within and through socially and culturally framed discourses continuously circulating in the multiple stages of my life (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). While writing this educational event in the form of a personal narrative, I realised that I had deeply internalised Western classical music tradition (or privileged knowledge (Teese, 2013), which is not usually accessible or available

within the home environment) through receiving formal music training and having access to higher education. With this moment of conscientisation, I understood that my emotional response made the classroom space less welcoming for students from low socioeconomic and marginalised cultural backgrounds. In this context, the story I wrote can be understood as a story I choose to tell about the life I have lived (Reid & Okoko, 2023; Roberts, 2002). This aligns with Goodson's (2017b) assertion that life stories are "already removed from lived experiences—they are lives interpreted and made textual and they represent a partial, selective commentary on lived experience" (p. 30). In this sense, I, as a storyteller, rendered my lived experience into a life story that offers a layer of interpretation (Goodson, 2017a).

Life stories become life histories when further interpretations are added as a second layer. In other words, life history is "a story that someone tells about their lives, the account that they give about things that have happened to them, set within a wider context" (Sikes & Goodson, 2016, p. 9). In the context of this inquiry, my stories moved to life history as I drew on 'thinking with critical pedagogy and affect theory' to interrogate and deconstruct the power dynamics in secondary music education, more specifically, the relationship between those at the centre (who determine what knowledge is valuable) and those at the periphery (who are marginalised, including students from minority backgrounds and those with diverse cultural and/or linguistic experiences) (Apple, 2004). In this sense, this inquiry was rooted in the life history approach as I analysed/interpreted the social, cultural, and political context of my life stories. Interrogating the power dynamics in secondary music education resonates with Goodson's (2017a) and Syaripudin's (2023) arguments that the life history as a methodological approach in educational studies is valuable when working with students and teachers who are positioned as marginalised and disadvantaged. The stories people tell about their lives offer critical insights and provide entry points into broader questions and the implications that responses to "these [broad] questions have for inquiry into any aspects of social life" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 2). Further, Bullough (1998) highlighted that "public and private cannot be separated in teaching and the person comes through when teaching" (pp. 20-21). Life history does not seek such separation; rather, it seeks holism (Goodson, 2017b). This is in accordance with the 'sociological imagination', as

defined by Charles Wright Mills (2000), who advocated placing researchers' individual life experiences within the broader public sphere and continuing to examine and interpret them. In this context, I read the Victorian music curriculum through the lens of my ontological-epistemological life history framework. I utilised the life history approach because personal information about how I perceived and experienced educational and other events in my life enabled me to understand my inquiry better (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Genealogical Excavations

In this inquiry, my grey documents of life (e.g., teacher planners, test or exam templates, lesson plans and professional development plans) served as informal documents (Roberts, 2002) that evoked memories and moments of teaching music at different Catholic and state secondary schools. By utilising these life history materials, I drew on telling moments in my life, adopting Pinar's (1994) *curre* method—that is, “an autobiographical means to study the lived experience of individual participants in curricular [educational program] conversation” (Kridel, 2010, p. 178). To utilise *curre* is to acknowledge my emergent insights and to explore the relationship between culture, the social structure and individual life (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), recognising that individuals are continuously shaped by their own life histories and experiences (Pinar, 2019).

The Currere Method

Currere, conceptualised by William Pinar (1994, 2023) as a foundational approach for curriculum development, is an act of “self-interrogation in which one reclaims oneself from oneself as one unpacks and repacks the meanings that one holds” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). Pinar (2023) explained that self-interrogation enriches self-understanding through critical reflection on an individual's lived experiences and evolving identity/subjectivity. In this sense, *curre* emphasises the personal, subjective and experiential aspects of education (Pinar, 2019, 2023). Currere also asks us to view ourselves “as we currently are and [as we] may come to be in the future, each of these viewpoints representing separate elements of an ongoing formation where each temporal

perspective informs the others” (Forde, 2023, p. 1).

According to Pinar (2023), *currere* emphasises “the lived curriculum, but [it] does not ignore the planned one, as they are intertwined” (p. 2). He explained that *currere* is the Latin infinitive of the word curriculum, which highlights one’s existential experience of curriculum, and it invites us to view curriculum as a process and journey (Pinar, 1994, 2019, 2023). *Currere* reconceptualises curriculum from course objectives, guidelines and outcomes to ‘complicated conversation’—that is, a conversation with oneself and with others, “threaded through academic knowledge, an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes educated for engagement in the world” (Pinar, 2019, p. 26). To rephrase, *currere*, which is understood not solely as a noun (e.g., objectivity, guidelines and outcomes) but as a verb (e.g., the running of the course of study), urges teachers and students to focus on their lived experience of curriculum. It shifts attention away from examining the course as a fixed intention in its design, toward experiencing and contemplating how the course unfolds in practice. Therefore, a teacher’s calling is to preserve the public sphere through complicated conversations, reviving the progressive project in which “we understand that self-realisation and democratisation are deeply intertwined” (Pinar, 2019, p. 123).

To engage authentically in such a complicated conversation that is curriculum, I utilised Pinar’s (1994) *currere* method, a four-step autobiographical process that includes regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic steps. Each step uniquely serves a specific purpose in aiding one’s self-understanding and accentuates the “temporal structure of educational experience” (Pinar, 2019, p. 25). The regressive step focuses on the past, and the progressive on the future. The analytic and synthetic steps attempt to comprehend the present (Downey, 2019). Through this *currere* approach, I reflected on how my learning experiences had informed the ways I taught music (the regressive step) and might teach music differently (the progressive step) to junior secondary students. I analysed the present in relation to the past and the future (the analytic step). Subsequently, I placed my past and present understanding in a dialectic relationship and examined their interactions. These interactions illuminated how my view of the purpose of secondary music education has shifted and evolved over time, reconceptualising how and why I teach music

(the synthetic step).

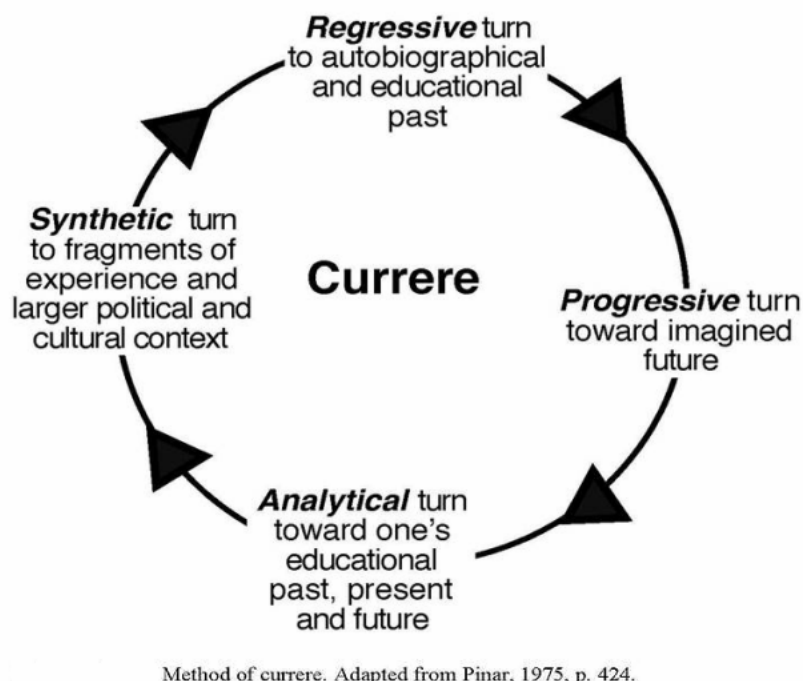


Image 3. The Currere Method (Petrina, 2014)

Utilising a reflexive autobiographical lens to make sense of who I am (or have become), where I am from, why I am here, and where I am going (Downey, 2019) aligns with the four steps of currere as outlined by Pinar (1994). Life is not something that is given to exist passively; rather, it is a “gift” that comes with a requirement to understand those existential questions (Pinar, 2023, p. 3). Hence, these four steps of currere enabled me to examine the linkages between the macro aspect of the Victorian music curriculum and education policies and the micro aspect of my choices of pedagogical approaches and curriculum content. For example, in the regressive step, I had a moment of conscientisation that I had not provided a classroom space where students felt valued and welcomed, regardless of their socio-cultural-economic backgrounds (because I prioritised reading and writing music notations in the classroom). This shows the linkages between my choice of curriculum content and pedagogical approaches to the Victorian music curriculum.

Using the four steps of the currere approach, I was encouraged to retrospectively and reflexively write about my personal teaching and learning experiences in order to produce different knowledge, which cannot be

generalised (Eisner, 1988; Haraway, 1988; Lyotard, 1984) as they are complex and multilayered (Marn, 2015). Moreover, utilising the currere approach aligns with Denzin and Lincoln's (2017) argument that qualitative researchers need to "open up and create new spaces for indigenous voices, explore new discourses, new concepts of equity and social justice, new forms of critical ethnography, and new performance stages" (p. 12). In other words, by producing different knowledge through the currere approach in this inquiry, I have attempted to engage readers in critical conversations about race, class, democracy and freedom. This is possible as my interpretation of the pedagogical approaches I used is informed by critical pedagogy and affect theory, which are to deconstruct the power relations between the centre and periphery (positioning myself at the centre of authority in the music class while existing in a marginalised space as a member of a cultural minority).

In this inquiry, the currere approach (Pinar, 1994) and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, 2023) functioned as interconnected analytical practices. The four steps of currere provided a temporal and autobiographical structure that enabled me to return to my past teaching and learning experiences to reflect on how they have shaped the ways I teach in the classroom, and to explore the past, present, and imagined future. Thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, 2023) opened up the possibility of analysing/interpreting those experiences by contemplating the experiences and moments re-encountered through currere alongside theoretical frameworks, such as critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a). This analytic practice of thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011, 2023) did not proceed by coding data to categorise recurring patterns and integrate them into themes. Instead, I placed specific experiences and moments in relation to theoretical concepts, then revisited and thought with them to see how these relations reshaped my understanding and opened up possibilities for new interpretations.

An Analysis of How My Narrative Emerged

Drawing on the currere method, I reflected on and analysed/interpreted the ways I learned music in both Korea and Australia, as well as my experiences

teaching junior secondary students across Victorian Catholic and state secondary schools. The currere approach enabled me to produce personal narratives that illustrate my teaching and learning experiences (Pinar, 1994). This approach resonates with narrative analysis, a process through which the researcher organises materials (or the grey, informal documents of the researcher's life) into a coherent developmental account (Polkinghorne, 1995). The purpose of narrative analysis is for "researchers to collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesise or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12).

Moving Beyond Thematic Coding

Narrative analysis is distinguished from the analysis of narrative in that "researchers collect stories as data and analyse them with a paradigmatic process to produce descriptions of themes that hold across the collected stories" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). To rephrase, in the analysis of narrative, narratives serve as the "source of the researcher's knowledge", as the researcher "analyses the narrative produced by others" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 694). In contrast, in narrative analysis, narrative is the "consequence of the research", with the researcher "produc[ing] a narrative from data, events, happenings, and information from various sources to create a [coherent] plot" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 694). In the post-qualitative inquiry section of this chapter, I have argued that my life experiences cannot be themed or coded because they are complex and multilayered. As I drew out of my narrative analysis (to produce a coherent developmental autoethnographic account), I aimed to understand how I organised the story I told to myself and others, such as students, their parents, colleagues, and an imagined audience, to reveal my notion of the purpose of secondary music education (Cole, 2018).

Narrating the Self

Trinh et al. (2022) argued that we write to return to the past and rewrite our special life events to "explore the hidden truth that is not yet known but invites exploration, empathy, and understanding from individual [and collective] situatedness" (p. 824). With Trinh et al.'s (2022) argument in mind, I first contemplated how my music teaching and learning experiences in Korea and

Australia influenced my pedagogical approach to teaching Years 7 and 8 students. This was through memory recall derived from artefacts such as teacher planners, test and exam templates, lesson plans, Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration supporting documents, and professional development plans. Secondly, I created personal narratives based on that contemplation, using a reflective journal format to document these recollections (the regressive step of *currere*) in a notebook labelled 'Back to the Past/Future'. Concurrently, I imagined and documented how I would teach music in the future (the progressive step) in my personal narratives. In this process of writing about the imagined future, I embraced Haraway's (2016) concept of *speculative fabulation*, which is a crucial tool for "imagining future-present that is different than the world we inhabit now" (Truman, 2019, p. 2). In other words, speculative fabulation is a storytelling practice that combines fiction (my imagined future music classes), facts (my actual music teaching experiences in the past), and critical pedagogy to blur the boundaries between fiction and fact, thereby creating alternative and imagined futures. Taking Haraway's (2016) concept of speculative fabulation into account, I wrote in detail about imagined futures rather than simply addressing how I will teach music differently. For example, I did not write in my narrative that I would photocopy the music textbook for students who could not purchase it. Instead, I imagined how my students might have responded if I had not followed the traditional, hegemonic approach to teaching music notation (by relying on the music textbook) but had adopted alternative approaches to help them learn. Examples of alternative teaching approaches I imagined are as follows:

- ✚ Using PowerPoint to show students musical notation so they do not need to feel excluded for not having the textbook.
- ✚ Incorporating digital technology software programs such as GarageBand or Logic Pro into music lessons for students to develop musical literacy and create songs that reflect their culture.
- ✚ Sharing their produced songs with the whole class or with each other to provide and promote culturally responsive music education.

While I value traditional pedagogical approaches to reading and writing music

notation, my imagined music classroom expands beyond the formal pedagogy with the aim of creating more socially inclusive and culturally responsive learning experiences. This shift does not diminish the music education students are experiencing (e.g., eliminating vital or privileged knowledge that can only be gained through possessing a textbook and participating in formal music education approaches). Rather, the imagined alternative pedagogical approach contextualises music education in ways that resonate with, and connect to, the ways junior secondary students experience music outside of school (Wright, 2016). What may be viewed as 'taken out' is rather compensated for by practices that invite personal expression, creativity and collaboration. In this way, students may not only learn how music works but also comprehend why it is important to them.

Thirdly, I re-interpreted the present in relation to the past (how I taught music to junior students) and the imagined future (how I would teach music differently) as part of the analytic step of currere. I then placed the past and the present in a dialectic relationship to address my insights into how I teach music (curriculum content choices and pedagogical approaches) and why I teach music (my view of the purpose of music education) have been formed and reformed, as part of the synthetic step.

While re-reading my personal narratives, I initially wrote the analysis and synthesis in a separate notebook, labelled 'De/Reconstruction'. However, I realised that writing into two different notebooks hindered the writing process. I continued to write about past educational events and their imagined futures, as well as my analysis and interpretations of those events in the 'Back to the Past/Future' notebook. It was difficult to continue writing about my train of thought to analyse educational events in the 'De/Reconstruction' book. I had to stop writing in order to find and open the 'De/Reconstruction' notebook, then re-engage in the thinking process. Often, I forgot what I was thinking or analysing. Additionally, it was challenging to describe how I taught and how I would teach differently without analysing and interpreting my past experiences. I realised that my past teaching experiences and the imagined futures, alongside analysing my present and synthesising them to tease out my view of the purpose of music education, were deeply intertwined. During this writing process, I once again comprehended that working through the four steps of

currere is a non-linear process, and my time in currere works recursively rather than linearly (Wang & Flory, 2024).

I also became aware of myself as bilingual and transnational (a Korean-born female migrant). As I move physically and mentally (trans) between Australia and Korea (nations), I maintain cultural connections with both countries (Yeom, 2024). For example, I read Korean and Australian News, watch Korean and Australian movies, and listen to Korean songs (including K-pop) while living in Australia. When visiting my parents and relatives in Korea, I stay in touch with my friends and colleagues in Australia and read Australian News. In this sense, I present how I engaged in dialogue across two languages (English and Korean) and cultures that are intricately entangled with one another. This suggests that I intermix English and Korean while “transacting with the cultural flows” from Australia and Korea (Yeom, 2024, p. 1386). My experience aligns with what Bhabha (1994) has termed a *third space*, which is “an interstitial space of cultural encounter’ in which different cultural groups negotiate, producing hybridity in culture” (Bhandari, 2022, p. 171). This notion of third space aligns with the writing process of my personal narrative, which involved intermixing the two languages. While primarily written in English, I occasionally used Korean words or phrases when I could not find English equivalents that conveyed the original meaning.

Translanguaging

In a narrative written on 21 December 2022, I reflected on a composition task I helped Catholic school Year 9 students with in 2009.

The Original Translingual Writing:

...the moment I played ‘River Flows in You’ by Yiruma for Year 9 students...

I am feeling...아련한 기분.

The mood written in Korean above conveys a sense of nostalgia and sadness, often connected to lingering emotions associated with memories. It is akin to recalling something or someone while feeling an ache in one’s heart at the thought of never seeing that someone or experiencing that something again. There is no direct equivalent for this mood in English, so I decided to translate it

into ‘a nostalgic and bittersweet feeling’. This expression carries cultural nuance that simple English words cannot easily convey. Hence, I did not attempt to translate word-to-word to “render the closest equivalent meaning possible” (Qoyyimah, 2023, p. 4). Instead, I translated to maintain the emotional resonance that transcends word-to-word translation.

Revised Version Written in English:

...the moment I played ‘River Flows in You’ by Yiruma for Year 9 students...
I am feeling...nostalgic and bittersweet.

Out of 70 personal narratives, 25 were written with an intermix of English and Korean, revealing my translingual thinking processes. Once I had written my personal narratives (noting that some are short, consisting of several sentences or a few words, with music notation or the images or symbols I drew, and others are over six pages), I organised each of them within social, historical, and educational contexts. Re-reading the narratives with the research question and sub-questions in mind, I linked and structured them partly chronologically and partly according to conceptual connections between my teaching/learning experiences and educational events. The five stories (presented in Chapter 5: Personal Narratives: Regressive and Progressive Moments) were not selected from the 70 individual narratives. Instead, they emerged from narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988) that constructed a coherent developmental plot by connecting events across multiple narratives (Cohen et al., 2018). In this process, I incorporated Jackson and Mazzei’s (2011, 2023) concept of thinking with theory, thinking these experiences and moments alongside theoretical frameworks, such as critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a). Each of the five stories was presented as an Etude in Chapter 5. Within each Etude, I presented specific experiences and moments related to the research question under musical sub-headings, such as Da Capo: October 2024 and Tempo Rubato: December 2013.

Multimodal Reconstruction of Narrative

I have provided songs for readers of this thesis, accessible via hyperlinks, to listen to while reading my narratives because sound offers us a “distinct way of

understanding of being and knowing” (Baker & Anderson-Kunert, 2019, p. 2). In other words, my multimodal reconstruction utilised music that tells a story, emphasising music’s ability to attain the embodied and affective aspects of my life (or lived experiences) that written text cannot capture and represent. This multimodal approach challenges the academy’s hegemonic form of knowledge reproduction and representation that has typically favoured written text as the means of collecting, analysing, representing and disseminating research (McKerrell & Way, 2017). In this sense, incorporating songs into this inquiry may democratise the knowledge production (Fuentes-George, 2023; McKerrell & Way, 2017). This view aligns with what Hull and Nelson (2005) have noted:

a multimodal text is not simply an additive art whereby images, words, and music, by virtue of being juxtaposed, increase the meaning-making potential of a text. Rather ... [it] can create a different system of signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constituent parts. (p. 225)

Hence, as noted earlier in this thesis, the multimodal approach allowed me to “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175) in order to disrupt and reject the academy’s traditional form of knowledge production.

Ethical Considerations

Do no harm is recognised as an essential starting point to protect participants (Hugman et al., 2011; Sparkes, 2024). This means minimising the risk of participants being injured physically, psychologically, socially, or morally (Buchanan & Warwick, 2021; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2023). All research activities, regardless of their methodologies, methods or disciplines, entail ethical issues and considerations that must be carefully addressed throughout the research process (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In addition, Buchanan and Warwick (2021, p. 1090) noted that “all researchers ... have a moral imperative to avoid harming research participants” (p. 1090). Following Buchanan and Warwick’s (2021) and Goodson and Sike’s (2001)

arguments, I obtained ethics approval from Victoria University through a submission process that explained:

- ✚ how I managed and minimised the potential risk of exposing other people who are constantly present in my narratives by referring to them as who they are (e.g., mum, dad, sister); and
- ✚ the potential social risk, which is telling my own stories publicly without the protection of anonymity, and how I attempted to minimise it by embracing my personal and researcher vulnerability, not revealing my hometown or my parents' hometown (both located in Korea).

Beyond procedural ethics, research per se is inherently political, as it influences the ways human beings make sense of their world (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Adams (2008) asserted that “situated chaos and uncertainty motivate the formation of ethical premises” (p. 177), necessitating the acknowledgement that researchers cannot predict the ways readers respond to or interpret their produced work (Bolen & Adams, 2016; Edwards, 2021; Tullis, 2021). Further, writing is not a neutral, innocent or objective activity, as writers must acknowledge the way their “beliefs, values and theoretical, political and methodological allegiances” affect both what they write and how they write (Vicars, 2022, p. 34). This argument suggests that writing about people's lives encompasses an auto/biographical process; hence, it would be unethical to provide a representation of those lives without explicitly acknowledging the specific gaze through which one observes and interprets them (Vicars, 2022). This means that, given my positionality (privileged and marginalised), I needed to carefully contemplate how I wrote about power dynamics in the institutional space without harming my family members, students, their parents and colleagues in my stories.

Ethical Re-Presentations of a Life as Lived and Life as Experienced

Post-foundational researchers must resist the pressure to present their work as neat and tidy and acknowledge that social life is complex and messy (Vicars, 2022). An essential ethical responsibility for these researchers is to engage in ongoing reflection throughout their research process in order to recognise any

unforeseen ethical issues that may arise (Adams, 2008; Dahal & Luitel, 2022; Xue et al., 2025). Taking Adams' (2008), Dahal and Luitel's (2022), Xue et al.'s (2025) and Vicar's (2022) arguments into account, I acknowledge that my personal narrative writing processes, drawing on the currere approach and narrative analysis, were messy, complex, and non-linear. Through navigating and reflecting on this messiness, I became aware of ethical issues, such as the privacy of myself and others, including my family members, students, their parents and colleagues, because *others* are constantly present in my stories.

These unexpected connections between myself and others in this inquiry were discovered as I shifted between memories and the telling moments of my teaching and learning experiences. This shift made me aware of how others are integrated and woven into my stories. Delving into personal details with people I know can cause ethical dilemmas—that is, the “responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are [a] part” (Barad, 2007, p. 393). Other scholars have also expressed concerns about the challenge of protecting the privacy of others in narrative research, especially given the highly personal nature of autoethnographic accounts (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Lapadat, 2017; Tullis, 2021; Wall, 2008; Xue et al., 2025). Therefore, care must be taken to safeguard the “privacy of others’ in autoethnographic stories” (Chang, 2008, p. 68). To provide care and manage the risk of exposing identities in this inquiry, I decided not to use pseudonyms for my family members, students and colleagues; I referred to them as who they are to me (e.g., dad, mum and younger sister). My approach to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of others mirrors Edwards’ (2021) argument that, rather than representing their experiences, I wrote about myself and my own experiences in interaction with the non-active participants who were present when those experiences occurred. By embracing a semi-transparent approach, which does not use pseudonyms but refers to non-active participants as who they are to me, I attempted to minimise possible identity exposure. However, I acknowledge that the identification of my parents and sister remains an ethical challenge because this thesis will be accessible to its readers (potentially including their friends and/or relatives). One consequence of my family members being identified could be that they may feel misunderstood or judged by the reader of this thesis on their values, life decisions and/or sociopolitical

views portrayed in the narratives. Additionally, my family members may feel misrepresented, as their perceptions of the life and educational events I described in the narratives may differ from mine. They might also recall or interpret the events differently. This aligns with Sparkes' (2024) assertion that the ethical responsibility for representing others and interpreting the narratives lies within autoethnographers. Following Edwards' (2021) and Sparkes' (2024) suggestions that ongoing reflection is essential in autoethnographic narratives, I asked my family members to read the narratives (written in Korean), and review what I intended to write in English to minimise misrepresentation of them in the narratives.

Another ethical issue that I considered was revealing myself as an inquirer using an autoethnographic approach without the protection of anonymity. I embraced my vulnerability by having the courage to make myself visible (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016; Vicars, 2016; Xue et al., 2025) and in doing so, put myself and my story at risk of "[potential] stigma, negative judgements by university [and secondary school] colleagues, and undesired career consequences" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 594). Revealing myself publicly could potentially pose a challenge to my colleagues' views (Tullis, 2021; Xue et al., 2025), or reveal conflicts with institutional authority that could lead to limited or strained relationships (Edwards, 2021; Rambo, 2016). Moreover, there are also risks of being unable to "take back what has been said, of not having control over how readers will interpret what is said and of feeling that [my] life is being critiqued" (Wall, 2008, p. 41). Presenting an intimate account and writing with the voices of multiple selves as an onto-epistemic centre provides a space for me to examine the institutional power dynamics that have shaped my teacher and learning (Denshire, 2014).

Chapter 5. Personal Narratives: Regressive and Progressive Moments

I now put to work my embodied, evocative narratives, guided by becoming-questions. Becoming-questions do not precede inquiry, but “emerge in the middle of plugging in [to theory and the world]” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. viii). Becoming-questions encourage wonderings and wanderings; exploration of the clefs and crevices that stoke the affective callings, the invitations, and emergences that arise out of particular historical, institutional, social, and familiar discourses. I am storytelling in a way that “[u]nderstands stories and narrative as not separate from the world (as an object), but as always, already constituting it—as living, breathing, material assemblages” (Hendry et al., 2018, p. 16) through the contingencies of evocative remembering.

Prelude: May 2025

On a sunny, warm Saturday, I was walking towards my university office. In the oval next to my university, a footy game was on. The crowd’s excitement and bitter disappointment (from the losing side) mixed and swirled in the air.

The oval is located along the Maribyrnong River. Right next to this beautiful river, there is a riverside walking track. Some people enjoyed jogging and others walking. A group of people were having a birthday party near the BBQ stations. Colourful balloons, swaying in the wind, danced frantically to a children’s song. On the other side of the BBQ stations, another group of people launched their canoes into the river, paddling under the bright sun.

All of a sudden, a pink ice cream truck appeared, announcing its presence with a faint, broken music-box-like sound. It reminded me of an alarm clock that my younger sister and I had in our room when we were about 10 and 12 years old. This arch-shaped, pale-pink alarm clock had a dial button in the middle, and we could turn it to choose one of six songs as the alarm sound. Billy Joel’s ‘Honesty’, Elton John’s ‘Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word’, and Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet Love theme were our favourites. Even though

the melody sounded rough, we still loved hearing each song so much. Waking up with a different song was so good, and we even had a long conversation about which one to choose for the next morning.

Come to think of it, music and sound have always been around me. My sister and I used to record our voices on our dad's record player. We talked in a variety of different ways: normally, strangely, quickly and slowly. We hummed and sang songs. We also acted out different scenarios, pretending to be a princess and a monster, or a teacher and a student. We then listened to what we had recorded and laughed together. We also enjoyed making mix tapes filled with Western pop songs for our parents to listen to while they were working in their store.

Why do my sister, our parents, and I love music? What made me learn how to play the piano? Why did I choose to become a music educator and researcher? What is music education for? What does music mean as an academic subject in school education? How have I perceived the purpose of music education? How do others perceive it?

These questions raced through my mind. I stopped walking towards the office, compelled to pause and contemplate the questions.

About a minute passed, and I hurried to the office. Once there, I pulled out my old laptop, placed it on the desk, and opened all the windows to let in fresh air. Hearing children laughing and giggling, I gazed at my laptop screen. On a blank Word document, the cursor blinked rhythmically as if to say, "Type something quickly!" In time with that steady tempo of the blinking cursor, two melodies began to overlap in my head: the twisted, faint tune I had heard from the pink ice cream truck on the oval, and 'Honesty' from my pink alarm clock.

Etude 1

Da Capo: October 2024

I spent a week in my hometown in Korea after I participated in an intercultural program for PhD students in Japan. Sitting in my sister's room, which used to be my room, I gazed at my upright piano. A wave of gratitude for my parents washed over me. They somehow managed to pay for the shiny black upright

piano and piano lessons.

On the piano, covered in dust, were my Beyer and Bastien piano method books. As I wiped the dust away, I suddenly remembered the day my piano teacher gently set aside my Beyer book and recommended Bastien's piano method books instead. Like most piano students of the late 1980s, I had been using the traditional Beyer method books, published in 1860.

"Why did the piano teacher recommend Bastien's piano method books?" I asked my mum, who was sitting next to me, watching a TV show on her tablet. *"I think it was a month after you attended that piano school. The teacher told me that you grasped the patterns in each song in the Beyer books pretty quickly. She thought you might get bored with the song repetition, and she was right; I remember you saying the songs are very similar. In the end, it was a good call to change the method books, and you really enjoyed learning songs in the new books."* Her answer reminded me of the first day of attending the Flower Piano School.

Innocente: 1988

Please click on Burgmüller's (1851/2020) '[Innocence](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

On a chilly winter day, aged seven, I was enrolled at a local piano school on the ground floor of a reddish-brown brick building next to the left of a shabby, run-down snack stand selling Dalgona (sugar honeycomb candies), and Korean corn dogs. Flower Piano School was not far from my childhood home and my school, both of which were within walking distance.

One of the streets I walked along on the way back from the piano school to my house was full of narrow, grey cement stairs, nearly 60 of them. After climbing those stairs with my tired seven-year-old feet, I would see a wide road that led to the hillside village. I had to cross that road and walk into a small side street to reach my childhood home. In that house, my mum used to burn several charcoal briquettes every day to warm our rooms in winter. A toilet and laundry space did not have a roof, so we had to wear slippers and an extra layer of clothes when accessing them. With no hot water heating system in the house, my parents had to heat cold water in a large pot on the gas stove in the kitchen,

then pour the boiled water into a portable stainless steel wash basin and gradually add cold water to bring the temperature just right. That was how we had a quick shower every day. I still vividly remember my sister sniffing while having a quick shower in that kitchen in winter. We could see our breath in the icy cold air.

We were poor, and the rooms were cold. My sister and I longed for a home with a gas or oil heating system. So many times, my mum would cry in agony while she was cleaning up burned charcoal briquettes and their residue in the kitchen. I thought she was crying because of the sharp smell of smoke from the charcoal briquettes (just as onions make you tear up). She would have come home during winter after a long day of work to find her children waiting for her in an icy-cold room, shivering and trying to warm up with blankets. Because the number of deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by charcoal briquettes rose in the 1980s and 90s, my mum would never leave them lit while she was out at work. Seeing my mum cry affected me very deeply: I wanted to be a good girl and help her in every way I could by cleaning the rooms, looking after my sister, and studying hard.

* * *

When I started learning songs in the Bastien method books, I was fascinated by them. The books featured many interesting, colourful pictures and images depicting different cultures. I clearly remember seeing pictures of children wearing attire reminiscent of Native Americans and 1950s retro costumes. There was a Mexican sombrero hat with a face, arms and legs, dancing on the floor with mirrored disco balls. Most of the songs had English lyrics (but not translated into Korean). I had no idea which language the crooked letters were in, or which countries they came from. Bastien's method books illustrated the title, the publisher's name, and the titles of each piece in English. The Korean translation of the title was minimal. Every page was filled with images and songs that captured my interest.

I gradually learned each piece and indirectly absorbed the different cultures embedded within them. My piano teacher could read English, so she taught me how to pronounce some words and even explained the meanings of

the lyrics. Sometimes she sang the songs in English. This encouraged me to play songs on the piano and sing in English, even though I didn't fully understand the language. Attending the Flower Piano School was about indirectly experiencing different cultures through the piano method books, and with my teacher's support.

Rigorous: 1990

I finished the Bastien piano course (levels 1-4). I was ready to move on to the next stage: learning the classical pieces by the composers I'd been dreaming about (Beethoven, Mozart). But sadly, that was when the Flower Piano School closed its doors. Around the same time, my dad bought the store where he had worked for a decade. After two years of hard work as a store owner, my dad opened a second store in another location in the market, not far from the first. We also moved out of my childhood house into a brand-new apartment. Our new home had a heating and cooling system, which meant no more heating water before showers, and no more charcoal-briquette smoke or ashes to clean up. Because my dad owned two stores, my mum joined him in opening them each morning and stayed behind the counter, greeting customers.

One day, I was enrolled in another piano school within walking distance of our store. This new school was on the first floor of an old beige apartment building. To get to the Beethoven Piano School, I passed a pop-up store selling freshly squeezed fruit juice, tucked between small stores. Most of them sold foreign products such as hair dye, accessories, pain patches and chocolates.

At the new piano school, just like other Korean students who learned to play the piano in the 1990s, I began learning and practising songs using books that were widely used in nearly every piano school in Korea. My technical foundation was rooted in the works of the 19th-century Western classical composers, which every Korean piano student knew by heart. Hanon's finger exercises became my daily ritual, repeated scales and arpeggios designed to cultivate 'finger dexterity, strength, and virtuosity'. I still remember the mechanical patterns I felt under my fingers, the feeling of my hands loosening before moving on to Czerny. My piano teachers and the students all called Czerny's exercises 'Czerny 30', and 'Czerny 40'—the numbers indicated the number of exercises in each book, implicitly indicating my progress in my piano-

learning journey. I gradually learned techniques by practising the Czerny 30 and 40 exercises. Through the Sonatine Album book (a collection of works by Clementi, Haydn, and Mozart), I learned phrasing and pedalling. It was the Sonatine album that taught me the importance of playing technique and listening to my own playing. Burgmüller's beautiful and charming 25 works added something else to my daily routine. Each piece in Burgmüller's book had a title (e.g., Arabesque, innocence), a mood, and a story to tell. The focus shifted from pure technique to expression.

Each evening began with scales; both hands moving together, ascending and descending in the rhythm patterns my teacher had shown me. Often, she demonstrated the long-short (dotted rhythm) pattern slowly, so I could understand before I tried it myself. Once warmed up, I moved on to other books. This sequence took about an hour, a routine repeated every day, along with private lessons with my teacher twice a week.

I particularly enjoyed playing Burgmüller's pieces. The bright, charming melodies written in C, G, or D major made me feel so happy and excited. Even though some sections were challenging, I gladly embraced them. The sense of achievement and accomplishment kept me going, and I felt proud of myself for playing songs that people, including my parents, know and enjoy. However, I found Hanon's and Czerny's exercise pieces somewhat dull. Some pieces seemed quite repetitive. I clearly understood that the purpose of the exercise books was to help learners develop specific finger techniques. But the more I practised, the less the melody resonated with me, and I felt mechanical, robotic, a practice machine rather than a person who enjoys learning music.

When the piano teacher said, "Let's move on to the next piece", I simply nodded and said, "Yes", calmly. In my mind, however, I thought, "Yes, finally! Goodbye, boring and difficult scale exercise piece. The next one is the one I really like; I can't wait to play it!" I didn't express what I felt or share my thoughts with the teacher because I wanted to show her that I also considered Hanon and Czerny important for becoming a proper piano player (one who acquires advanced techniques). No one told me this directly. It was learnt and internalised, a rule that all students needed to follow without question. Sometimes, when the teacher said, "Let's move on", I thought, "Is it okay? I don't think I actually mastered the technique I was supposed to master in this

piece.” I didn’t ask, but I just thought. This anxiety or concern was embedded in my ways of teaching Years 7 and 8 students years later in Australia, that I wanted my students to understand the topic we learnt, and that was why I asked them to bring their textbook, without realising that I was doing the same thing to my students as my piano teacher did to me.

My progress in learning Western classical music depended on my ability to read and write music notation, which was gradually improving, and I found it fun. Sometimes, I quietly listened to challenging pieces other students played in their practice rooms, wishing that one day I would play the very same pieces when I reached that level. I loved playing pieces just for me. I didn’t enjoy performing in front of an audience because I was afraid of making mistakes.

My mum loved listening to Richard Clayderman’s ‘Ballade pour Adeline’, so she often asked me to play it for her. I wasn’t very confident because I hadn’t learned the piece at the piano school. I had to read the sheet music on my own (my mum bought it for me to learn) and play it without formal lessons. Some notes were difficult to read because they were floating so high above the staff that the ledger lines felt endless. I tried to play it to her, but the lack of confidence always caught up with me, and I would stop halfway (before reaching the part full of ledger-lined notes). Each time I paused, I could feel her disappointment.

Fermata: October 2024

Those times seem so long ago. My piano schools are now gone forever, replaced by massive apartment complexes. Only tall, grey concrete buildings stand in their place, staring at me every time I visit that area. Reminiscing about the piano schools made my heart and throat ache, bringing tears to my eyes. I see a little girl who wanted to please her mum, to ease her pain by performing pieces she liked, and that little girl is still in me. The past is a living thing, and it is in my wounds (that I live so far away, about 8,300 kilometres away, and we only meet in person once every one or two years), which remain open in the present. Living in Australia has made part of me a different person that my mum sometimes doesn’t recognise. This wound has not yet healed. The wound will probably not heal over during the course of my (and my mum’s) life. This has weighed on my heart ever since I migrated to Australia 18 years ago. I ask

myself the same questions again: *What am I doing here? What do I live for? Who do I want to become?*

When I reflected on my past music learning experience, I realised that I had spent years reading and writing notation, hearing melodies, practising techniques, and studying theory. It was all shaped by the standardised, structured piano curriculum in Korea. I never thought there might be an alternative way to learning piano besides using Hanon and Czerny exercise books. However, without realising it, I was adopting an alternative way of learning and playing pieces: trying to figure out which notes to play in ‘Ballade pour Adeline’, playing random notes on the piano, and listening to and memorising pieces other students had practised and played.

Why has piano curriculum and pedagogy in Korea become so entrenched in a sequence of method books and pieces composed by Beyer, Czerny, Mozart and Burgmüller? Did learning the piano through the sequence of books shape my belief in the purpose of piano and music education? Did my view of music education’s purpose shape the ways I taught music to students in Victorian secondary schools?

Etude 2

Da Capo: January 2023

Please click on Incognito’s (1993) [‘Smiling Faces’](#) and let it accompany you on this journey.

I had come to Korea to visit my parents during a family vacation. At my mum’s suggestion that I take some time alone and step away from parental duties, I gladly headed to the university to gather materials for my thesis.

I put in my earbuds as I headed to the bus stop. Incognito’s ‘Smiling Faces’ was playing from my phone, one of my all-time favourites since 1998. As I climbed the stairs, I felt like I was a university student once again. About two decades ago, 18-year-old me stood at this very bus stop, listening to the same song. Before I knew it, I was middle-aged, living in another country, speaking a language different from the one I used as a child. It felt strange to be listening to ‘Smiling Faces’ in that very spot. I was the same person, yet became a different

person ... I was waiting for the bus to reach campus, but with an entirely different heart. The bus ride that once took 50 minutes became possible only after a twelve-hour flight.

Gazing at the people on the bus and the familiar buildings passing by, I felt a strange ache in my heart. Tears welled up in my eyes. I used to see these streets and buildings every day. I didn't even pay close attention to them; they were just there in the background, on my journey to and from the university. I'd been living abroad for so long, so the 'once familiar buildings' became 'still familiar yet somehow new' with colourful signboards. This feeling may have been stirred by the music I was listening to, or by the heartbreaking sadness of saying goodbye to my parents and sister in several days. They would remain in the home that had once been mine, while I returned to Australia, a country that had once felt foreign. Or perhaps it was a longing for my younger university days.

Once I arrived on campus, I entered the music building. Visitors were greeted by a full-length mirror with a dark brown frame, its four corners adorned with decorative attachments. This was the mirror my past self used to sneak glances into while walking through the building 20 years ago, albeit worn by the passing years. It seemed as though the 18-year-old me reflected in the glass was asking the 40-year-old me before it if I felt happy with the choices I made: leaving Korea to live in Australia, leaving piano performance to teach music at high schools, no longer speaking my mother tongue daily, but speaking English, my second language that became almost like a mother tongue.

Glancing past the mirror, I saw the door leading into the small concert hall where I had performed Western classical pieces for my university entrance audition. I stood still for a moment in the whirlwind of memories: the black velvet curtains, the hand warmers, a gas heater that made funny noises, and my 17-year-old self, in my high school uniform, holding my breath anxiously while waiting for my turn to perform. The strategies I had to devise with my parents and teachers to gain admission to this university, and the long hours of daily practice.

The university application system operated on a principle of controlled scarcity. Students could apply to only three universities. The process unfolded with bureaucratic precision: first came the College Scholastic Ability Test

(CSAT), then the score release, and the systematic sorting into three predetermined categories. Each institution belonged to Group A, B, or C, and the rules were non-negotiable: one application per group, three applications in total.

Most students consulted their teachers and parents and developed a standard risk-management approach: Group A was the reach school, where rejection was more likely than acceptance. Group B was the match school, where their CSAT scores suggested reasonable odds. Group C was the safety school, where acceptance was almost guaranteed. Students decided which offer to accept. When they received acceptances from multiple groups, they typically enrolled at the Group A university, which held higher prestige and required stronger CSAT scores.

After assessing my finalised CSAT score and consulting with my parents and teachers, I strategically applied to three different universities for a Bachelor's degree in piano performance. All of them were in my hometown, not too far from my house. I sensed that I would not be accepted to study music at prestigious universities in Seoul (the capital city of South Korea) because of the short preparation time for the performance exams, even though my CSAT score was high enough. Without knowing it, I had internalised the system's logic by strategically choosing three universities. I was not simply deciding where to study piano performance; I was calculating risk, managing institutional constraints, performing the optimisation that the system demanded of 17-year-old bodies.

Agitato: December 1999

The audition day for the Group B university arrived. It was held on a bitterly cold winter day. I was worried my fingers would freeze and I wouldn't be able to play the pieces that I'd diligently prepared for all year. Beyond the cold, I felt even more nervous as such thoughts were racing through my mind:

I only had about a year to prepare for the auditions. Unlike me, some students had lessons from (retired) professors or had been training for the audition since middle school (three to four years of training).

I shook my head and told myself to focus on the performance, not compare myself to others. I held the hand warmers tightly, waiting for my turn in

the concert hall with the other students. Entering the audition room, I saw black curtains stretched from the ceiling to the floor, making it impossible to see who the assessors were or how many were there to listen to my playing. They didn't even know my name or which high school I was attending. They identified me only by number, a measure designed to prevent university admission fraud that often made news headlines.

As I played, I realised that I was actually playing better than I had anticipated. I was worried that if I played poorly, I'd have to retake the CSAT exam and auditions next year, which would be very disappointing. When I played wrong notes, I slowed down a bit and tried not to dwell on them. After finishing, I felt quite confident, unlike how I had felt at the other auditions. The Group A audition (being my first) was difficult because my hands trembled uncontrollably. The Group C audition went better, but nothing extraordinary. This audition (Group B, the last one) felt quite different, as I played calmly even when I hit a few wrong notes.

The auditions were finally over. All I could do was wait. My experience shows how I internalised the narrative about who belongs in elite spaces (e.g., students who had long prepared for auditions and received lessons from retired professors). I realised that my inadequate performance skills (compared to elite piano students) were embodied affects that created boundaries between elite and non-elite students (such as someone like me). My body shrank at the thought that I had only a year to prepare for the auditions. *Why had I stopped learning the piano?*

Largo: 1995

Please click on Kim Min-Gi's (2004) '[Morning Dew](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

In the second year of middle school, I had to discontinue attending Beethoven Piano School. I became very busy preparing for the joint high school entrance examination, which was a competitive exam for those aiming to enter an academic (or regular) high school. In Korea, there are several types of high school (academic, vocational, and specialised, such as international, Arts,

foreign language and science). If students didn't meet the cut-off score on the exam, they wouldn't be enrolled in such a high school but would instead attend a vocational school. It was a reality that students in vocational paths found it very difficult to enter universities (four-year courses provided), and most went on to colleges (equivalent to TAFE in Australia, with two-year courses provided) or sought employment right after graduation. Getting in depended on this exam; if I missed the required score, I would be automatically sent to a vocational school. To do what I had to do to qualify for university entrance, I sacrificed the after-school hours I spent at the piano school, where I loved learning and playing songs. My parents didn't ask me to stop attending the piano school; it was my decision. They even encouraged me to continue lessons, but I persuaded my mum to let me attend a mathematics school (near my parents' store) instead. Aware that I needed extra help in mathematics, I willingly, but with a heavy heart, gave up studying piano and headed to the math school every day.

* * *

Each day after school, I walked for about 15 minutes down a wide road beside a tall, grey-white Catholic Centre building, passing apartments, supermarkets, and medical clinics to reach the math school near my parents' store. I had no idea that the Catholic Centre building was a symbol of democracy for the people of my hometown. To me, it was just a building, no different from the others around it. However, after briefly studying modern and contemporary Korean history in my third year of middle school, and hearing my parents' stories about the June Democracy Movement of 1987, the Catholic Centre building became something very special to me.

My parents witnessed the Democracy Movements firsthand and participated in them covertly. They helped hide university students and citizens, who were protesting against the military government, in their store when the police were chasing them in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Protesters rushed desperately into the shops in the market, seeking shelter wherever store owners and waitstaff could hide them. If caught, they were taken to jail. The Catholic Centre became a gathering place for people of my hometown who were crying

out for freedom and democracy. Police tried to disperse the crowds with force, but they could not storm the Catholic Centre building because it was a religious space.

One day, students were introduced to the democracy movements of the late 1980s. We discussed the experiences Koreans endured to preserve democracy and freedom (including the freedom to choose what to wear, read, listen to music, watch movies or TV shows, and where to travel). We also learned about the military dictatorship from 1961 to 1988 and the June Democratic Movement in 1987 (for a constitutional amendment to allow direct presidential elections and restore democracy). This historical context helped me understand why my parents held such a deep fondness for Korean *minjung kayo* (which means ‘the people’s song’). This genre originated in modern Western folk and country music and represented the democratic movement between the 1960s and 1980s. Protesters used the melodies of *minjung kayo* to express dissent against authoritarian rule. I vividly remember my parents listening to and singing along to Kim Min-Gi’s ‘Morning Dew’ and ‘Evergreen Tree’. My parents also loved Western pop (particularly The Carpenters, Eric Clapton, The Beatles, and Simon and Garfunkel) as well as classical pieces like Beethoven’s ‘Für Elise’ and Strauss II’s ‘The Blue Danube’. They seldom listened to Korean pop music (like Rock and Trot, which differed from Korean *minjung kayo*). They explained that this was because of where they were from.

Historically and politically, their hometown was near Gwang-Ju, a southern city known for the 1980 Democratisation Movement. Between 18 and 27 May 1980, a mass protest against the Korean military government occurred in Gwang-Ju. Though violently suppressed and unsuccessful in bringing about political change, it has been widely regarded as a watershed moment in South Korea’s democratic struggle.

When the dictatorship began in 1961, it changed the way Koreans lived. Music and books were censored and banned, and those who distributed them were reported to the National Intelligence Service agency for imprisonment. For example, Tom Jones’ ‘Delilah’ was banned due to its sexually suggestive and immoral lyrics. Kim Min-Gi’s ‘Morning Dew’ was censored for lyrics interpreted as symbolising the dictatorship. The military government had condemned the Gwang-Ju Democratisation Movement as a rebellion, though it is recognised

today as a defining struggle for democracy. Censorship and the way the citizens of Gwang-Ju were labelled 'rebels' shaped the kinds of music my parents came to prefer.

For my parents, listening to Western pop songs and minjung kayo meant resistance to dictatorship, a covert fight against censorship, and a yearning for freedom and democracy. While studying modern Korean history, I discovered a deep passion for human rights and advocacy, for protecting the vulnerable and marginalised. I dreamed of becoming a human rights lawyer, standing beside those facing injustice and helping to shape a more just world. That dream was so clear to me, and I could not have known that ordinary moments would set me on an entirely different course.

Andante Cantabile: October 1997

Please click on Incognito's (1996) '[A Shade of Blue](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

The wife of a newly appointed pastor came to me (I was in Year 10) after the students' worship service.

"Suzie, you know how to play the piano, right?"

"Um... Yes..." I said. Meanwhile, I thought to myself: *She must have seen me playing hymns.*

"Great!" Her eyes were sparkling with hope and relief.

"Are you interested in accompanying the high school students' worship service? Our current accompanist will be moving to another city for university, so we need a new accompanist, starting in two months. I can teach you how to read and play chord progressions since my major is music composition. What do you think?"

"Alright, I will give it a try."

Over the next two months, I prepared for my new role. I started learning to read and play diminished and suspended chords from gospel songs. Listening to the sound I made on the piano and learning the chord progressions made me remember the times I went to the Flower and Beethoven Piano Schools.

How much I had loved being at the piano. How had I forgotten it?

The feeling in my fingers was familiar, like the time I played Burgmüller's pieces. I played chord progressions and other Christian pop music for hours without knowing it, and it felt very different from playing Czerny's and Hanon's exercise pieces.

Playing hymns using the classical four-part harmonies in the hymnal, as well as Contemporary Christian Music (CCM, also known as Christian pop), which required improvisation and personal interpretation, prompted me to explore other musical genres. I began borrowing CDs from the pastor's wife, who had an extensive music collection. Through that exploration, I encountered rhythm and blues (R&B) and jazz. I particularly loved acid jazz, a musical style that combines elements of jazz, funk and soul. The thrill when I first heard Incognito's 'A Shade of Blue' was indescribable: the bass guitar, the strings, the chord progressions, the lyrics and the harmonies of the vocalists.

Being asked to accompany students' worship services had influenced me deeply. I learned to read and write chords and also improvise. Every Sunday morning, I sang and accompanied various kinds of songs, including Korean traditional hymns in the pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A), Western hymns, gospel, and CCM. In the hymnal, I found songs with Korean lyrics and four-part harmony written for four voices (soprano, alto, tenor and bass). I loved the songs I sang at the worship services because they were very different from the pieces I learned at the Beethoven Piano School and in middle and high school (Western classical music). I also enjoyed listening to my parents singing hymns, minjung kayo and Western pop songs together. My dad, despite being a self-taught amateur, was particularly skilled. Although he could not read music notation, he sometimes asked me to help him learn to read sheet music so he could play songs on the piano and guitar. My sister told me that he often played my piano for hours after I migrated to Australia.

* * *

The dream of becoming a human rights lawyer gradually shifted in Year 10, since I was asked to play the piano for the student worship services at my church. When I told my parents I wanted to study piano performance at a university instead of law, they respected my decision. They did not try to

discourage me with a long-winded explanation about how difficult it might be to succeed as a professional musician. I believe they appreciated music themselves and wanted me to fulfil the dream they were unable to follow. With their support, I started attending piano lessons to prepare for the university entrance auditions. I also had to prepare for the CSAT.

I was not overly anxious about the CSAT, as I thought I could achieve a score high enough to gain admission to the local university I hoped to attend. The real challenge was the auditions, which required intense preparation alongside my daily high school studies. My school day began at 8 am with mandatory self-study, followed by eight 50-minute periods that ran until 5 pm. During these periods, I studied English, mathematics, science, and other humanities and language subjects. After a short dinner break, I headed to the music practice room and practised the audition repertoire (e.g., a Chopin Etude and Beethoven Sonata) until 9 pm. Meanwhile, my classmates who were not pursuing music remained in the classrooms for the evening self-study sessions. Afterwards, I returned home to work on English or mathematics until about 1 am. This became my routine throughout Years 11 and 12.

Fermata: October 2003

Thinking about my plan to study music for a master's and doctorate degree in France reminded me of a sessional lecturer who taught the 'Western Classical Music History' unit at my university. They had studied in the United States of America (USA), lived near Seoul, and also taught this unit at different universities. The lecturer took the bullet train to my university to teach us for three hours per week. I got to know them by asking questions during and after lectures. I also had received a perfect score on a written exam that they had warned would be very difficult and tricky without serious study. Knowing that they studied in the USA, I asked them whether studying abroad led to different career possibilities. They said, "Yes!" confidently and shared their own experiences studying not just music performance, but also musicology and ethnomusicology. They also mentioned that music performance is not the only option I could choose; others include school music education, composition, and music psychology. They made me think about travelling, performing, and practising for the next two or three decades in my life. I realised that I wanted to

do something with people. I wanted to engage in teaching and learning with people, interacting and co-creating something meaningful for everyone involved, rather than performing from a distance as a soloist on stage. I wanted to connect with people through music. Once I realised this, something in my body felt light.

Intermezzo: 2005

After realising that my passion lay in educating and supporting people with and through music, my parents and I decided that I would study in Australia rather than in France. I wanted to speak English fluently first, then pursue a master's degree in music teaching or performance at Skyview University (the name of the university has been anonymised for privacy purposes). I felt relieved that the course I was aiming for provided both music performance and teaching units. I also felt more comfortable learning to write and speak English than French.

I focused on music performance and music teaching approaches such as Kodály and Orff, and did not face many challenges as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) speaker. For oral presentation assessments, I wrote out my speeches in advance and practised them repeatedly. I got along well with fellow students. I remember spending each day communicating with them without any difficulties in ensemble performance classes and masterclasses. Maybe that was because we (fellow students from New Zealand, Canada, Japan and Taiwan) communicated through and with the music, so language may not have been a significant barrier.

My studies also centred on Western classical performance, reflecting the curriculum and pedagogy I had encountered at my Korean university. As my graduation approached, my piano teacher asked me about my future plans. They hinted that I could study an initial teacher education course at Oceanview University (another pseudonym), or any other Australian university for a year or two, and that obtaining teacher registration to work in schools would be a huge help in the future. The teacher and I had often had reflective discussions during our lessons. Understanding the reasons I enrolled in this master's course in teaching and performance at Skyview University, they told me about the initial teacher education course.

Etude 3

Moderato: March 2023

While stuck in traffic on one of Melbourne's busiest roads, I suddenly noticed a building on the street. It looked very familiar. *I've never been inside that building nor walked on this street...*

Its colour and design resembled those of a building at Oceanview University, where I completed my Graduate Diploma course in Melbourne in 2008, more than a decade ago. As I gazed at this uniquely designed cream-coloured building while waiting for the red light to change to green, memories of that joyful yet incredibly challenging time flooded back. I studied with about 80-100 other students. In the first couple of weeks of the course, I looked around the lecture halls and tutorial classes and realised I was among several other EAL students. These students were from Brazil, Italy, Malaysia, and Mauritius, and I was struck by the confidence and proficiency of their English, both spoken and written.

During tutorials (which were unfamiliar to me), I was stunned to see most of the pre-service teachers confidently sharing their opinions with classmates and tutors. Korean universities offer only lectures, with master classes and private lessons provided by the music faculty. I tried to share my thoughts as well, but because I had to speak much slower than the others, it felt like I was holding everyone back. The lecturers and tutors explained learning theories I had never heard of, and the vocabulary used to elaborate on each theory was unfamiliar to me. I couldn't follow the lecturers' and tutors' explanations, so I sat still and nodded as if I understood the whole thing. Throughout lectures and tutorials, whenever I encountered vocabulary I didn't understand, I would have to quickly look up the meaning in my electronic dictionary (this was 2008, so smartphones weren't around yet). Searching for the meaning of vocabulary would lead me to miss other explanations, and I would fall behind. Because I couldn't understand the content or topic, I was on edge when other students shared their opinions with the whole class and hoped no one would ask me to share mine. Whenever a question was asked, my chest would feel very heavy, like a stone, and my heart would race. My palms would sweat. Even when I managed to answer, I thought *I didn't speak very well like the other students.*

What if people think I am not teacher material? A sense of self-loathing would return. I sat in a corner of the classroom like *a sack of barley*, hoping every day would end quietly; that no one would ask me questions. I had chosen to come to Australia because I didn't like repetitive, mechanical music training. Yet, I found myself sitting silently in the classroom, unable to express myself, just nodding and smiling. What had I become, and why was I there? I scolded myself for only understanding about 30 percent of the lectures and tutorials, and my heart burned with frustration and despair so many times. This experience was so overwhelming, and panicked thoughts were running riot in my mind:

What does 'implement' mean? What is 'scaffolding'? How can I integrate or incorporate learning theories into my teaching practice? Aside from curriculum and pedagogy, what else do I need to know? What is the Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct? Studying to become a classroom music teacher is way more demanding than I had anticipated ... I don't understand what the lecturers were explaining ... Should I give up? Will I be able to complete this teaching course? It is too difficult. But I don't want to give up. I want to see if I can do this. Maybe I should give myself a month to get used to all this new vocabulary and decide what to do next.

The uneasy feelings that came from not fully understanding the Australian educational system and the Victorian music curriculum, combined with the burden of studying and completing teaching placements in another language, shaped an unrealistic and unachievable ideal image of a classroom teacher: someone who explains musical concepts clearly, manages students effectively, works collaboratively with colleagues, and communicates confidently with students and their parents and/or guardians. I consistently pushed myself toward my ideal model and felt frustrated, sad, and defeated when the gap between my ideal self and my actual self as a teacher could not be closed. In doing so, I worked to refine my English-speaking skills to ensure that my accent and speaking style did not stand out excessively among others in the school.

During the month I gave myself, I focused on the most commonly used vocabulary in lectures and tutorials, and reached out to fellow students, lecturers and tutors for support. I also stayed at the university library until closing to read books and journal articles, and worked hard to understand what I was learning and why. Fortunately, after about 30 days, my effort paid off:

lectures and tutorials became easier to follow, and I gradually felt more comfortable sitting in class and sharing my opinions. I was no longer a sack of barley left lying around.

Allegro Agitato: May 2008

Please click on Yiruma's (2001a) '[Maybe](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

I began my first 20-day teaching placement at a Catholic secondary school not far from the Melbourne central business district (CBD) and within walking distance of my home. Leaves richly coloured in autumnal tones crunched under my feet as I walked across the park each morning. While walking, I quietly rehearsed what I planned to teach in music classes. Having never attended Australian or Victorian primary or secondary schools, I wasn't familiar with the ways students learn in the classroom. Since I had only been in Melbourne for three years (from 2005), my English communication skills were still developing. I also had to relearn musical terminology in English.

My mentor teacher at the placement school, a jazz musician, seemed a little confused by my unfamiliarity with the school routine. After hearing that I was an international student, the mentor assigned me to teach Year 9 elective and Year 12 music classes. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) students were focusing on analysing Ella Fitzgerald's 'It Don't Mean a Thing', to prepare for their final written exam. I wasn't familiar with the piece, so I had to study it (rather than just listen) on my own first.

Year 9 students focused on theory (e.g., major and minor scales and intervals). Unlike the prescriptive VCE music study design (Unit 3), I had more freedom to introduce Korean piano pieces. Students asked me to teach them how to play certain pieces. With my mentor's permission, I turned the theory-focused lesson into a practical session. All twelve Year 9 students wanted to play Yiruma's 'Maybe', so I taught them the melody part first (the right-hand section, transposed into C major rather than its original key, in D-flat major), then sent them in pairs to practice rooms for 30 minutes. While mastering the melody, students helped each other, figured out the harmony part (the left-hand section), and then asked me to confirm that they were heading in the right

direction. Of the 100-minute music sessions, we practised this piece for about 70 minutes, twice a week for three weeks. All twelve students were able to play the melody, with several also playing the harmony. They loved learning this piece and expressed their interest in learning other piano pieces. They also asked me about terminology, such as arpeggios and da capo al fine, which were written on the sheet music. Students began to see why they were also focusing on music theory, as it helped them understand the sheet music. Despite my earlier fears that I might not be able to teach confidently, I built positive relationships with the Year 9 students. With the mentor's supportive comments on areas where I needed to improve when facilitating practical sessions, the feeling of fear transformed to relief and a sense of reward.

On the final day of my placement, my mentor told me that, based on my teaching of Year 12s, I should have received a score of 2.5 out of 5 (a pass, though not a good result). However, I was more successful in how I communicated with Year 9 students and in their learning of major and minor scales and intervals through Yiruma's 'Maybe'. For this, the mentor gave me 3 out of 5, which, while not a great score, gave me hope. I thought that now I had experienced teaching in a Victorian school, the next placement would be somewhat easier. This first placement taught me not only the importance of putting more effort into clearly explaining topics but also connecting students with music they like to listen to and play. Experiencing firsthand how a Catholic secondary school operates day-to-day and understanding what Years 9 and 12 students learn in music classes boosted my confidence for my next teaching placement.

Dolce: August 2008

It was the first day of the second placement at Eucalyptus Catholic School (a pseudonym). Entering the school gate, I was greeted by a beautifully maintained flower garden, a tall fountain splashing water, and rows of parked cars. The building looked elegant. Students busily walked towards the school entrance across the lawn. Their hats and school blazers were adorned with sparkling badges (some had just a few, others had lots), and they looked immaculate. A thought quickly crossed my mind: *Can I do well this time?*

Perhaps because I had passed my first placement, I felt less nervous.

The new mentor teacher introduced themselves with a warm smile, telling me they had taught music at Skyview University before joining this school. They also explained that in Semester 2, VCE students (Years 11 and 12) would be focusing on exam preparation, so I would mostly be teaching Years 7, 8, and 9 students. The mentor teacher gave me documents outlining the topics I would be teaching, which were prepared for student-teachers and casual relief teachers (CRTs). While reading through the documents, I quietly thought: *This is a new beginning, and I will do my best.*

* * *

In the second week of the teaching placement, my mentor offered me the opportunity to teach a topic I wanted to cover with Year 8 students (a 100-minute session). From my observations of the mentors' classes, I recognised that Year 8 students at this school received private or group music lessons and could read and write music notation. Thus, I needed to select a topic that would hold students' attention while being enjoyable yet challenging. I reviewed the music sheets and teaching resources provided by one of the lecturers at Oceanview University. Sarah Reeve's (2008) 'Lah Rumba' rhythm patterns seemed complex enough for Year 8 students, and I thought that they may even be able to learn the melody of the rhythm patterns playing on soprano, alto and bass xylophones within 100 minutes. I taught the rhythm patterns by chanting the words of the three parts, then incorporated body percussion to produce sounds with finger clicks, hand claps and foot stomps.

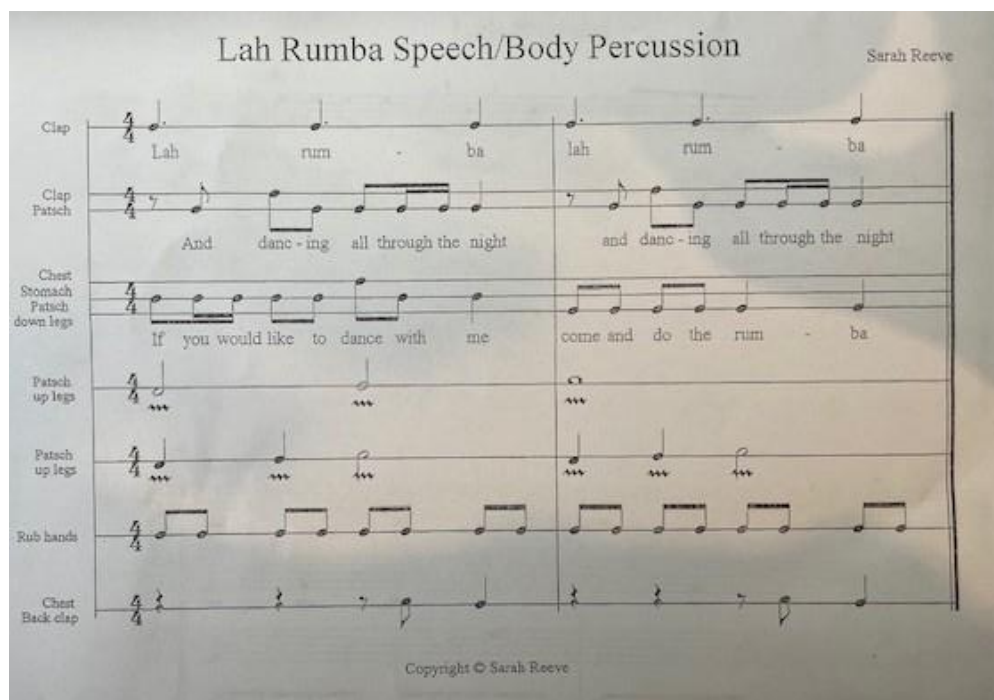


Image 4. Lah Rumba (Reeve, 2008)

Each music classroom was spacious, allowing students to gather in small groups to work on their learning activities and to play instruments such as xylophones and other wooden percussion instruments. About 35 xylophones were available for students to play.

'Lah Rumba' was played in polyphony mode. Students assigned the 'Lah Rumba' rhythm pattern played the bass xylophone with notes. Other students played the guiro and agogo bell without chanting the words. Students learned to play all the different rhythm patterns fairly quickly. Then we listened to the sounds produced by the soprano, alto, and bass xylophones. We also chanted the words and clapped, clicked, and/or rubbed hands. The students and the mentor teacher said it was a good 100-minute lesson, that they had so much fun listening, playing, and chanting. This musical style was not taught or performed in the music classroom, and they appreciated it. I was also impressed by the Year 8 students, who were able to learn the rhythmic patterns, play them on the xylophone, and follow the instructions to play the melody well.

The lesson was a success because xylophones were available for me to play at Oceanview University. In addition, I received step-by-step training from the lecturers on how to teach playing xylophones.

Intermezzo: May 2025

Thinking about all the resources available at Oceanview University and Eucalyptus Catholic School, I also recall teaching music at Cherry Blossom State School (a pseudonym) from 2010, where there were no xylophones or grand pianos. Thus, I had to devise new lesson plans and employ different teaching strategies, following the music coordinator at the state school. This was the *praxis shock* I later learned about while pursuing my doctorate. I remember some students didn't have prior knowledge of music theory or performance techniques (since they didn't have music tuition), so it was challenging to teach Year 8 students a rhythm pattern like 'Lah Rumba'. They sat behind the tables (there was no spacious music classroom) and used their hands or pens to make sounds because we didn't have soprano, alto or bass xylophones. I thought this learning environment hindered student learning, with too little room to walk around and too few musical instruments to learn rhythmic and melodic patterns. In addition, the differences in the classroom expectations and assessment tasks (e.g., bibliography, 300-word essays, oral presentation, completing an assignment outside of class, excursions to museums, galleries, and music concerts at catholic schools) accumulate to create a significant gap between students (enrolled in private versus state schools).

At Cherry Blossom State School, I was seeing a different landscape. Instead of colourful flowers and a tall fountain, through the window of the staff office I saw walls covered in graffiti and windows with shutters. Instead of polished black shoes, I was greeted by students with white and black sneakers. Instead of grand pianos, xylophones, and smart boards, there were empty instrument shelves and a movable whiteboard with a missing wheel, which I had to push with all my might just to get it into a classroom. The classroom for theory and the classroom for playing instruments were separate, with desks and chairs packed tightly together in the theory classroom. There was no space on the floor to sit and play any instrument.

There was also a different me. The me who always shouted at students to enter and exit in a row without running for safety reasons. The me who carried instruments with both arms, moved desks, and simultaneously instructed students to prepare for class. The me who, in that cramped theory classroom, asked students to play rhythm patterns using pens instead of

instruments. The me who warned them not to clap too loudly, worried that the sounds we made might become too noisy for other teachers and students. My students and I were teaching and learning in the practice room covered in loose cotton (which served as a substitute for soundproofing) and sweating on hot days due to a broken air conditioner. I, who felt both apologetic toward them and helpless, was wondering how I could teach them better. I, who took the facilities of Eucalyptus Catholic School and my university for granted, unaware that they were a privilege, and who yearned for them while attempting to teach the same content, the same way to the state school students. I was reproducing elite education.

Etude 4

Innocente: January 2023

In the fourth week of a visit to my parents in Korea, I was chatting with my mum over breakfast. My three-year-old daughter was playing a rainbow-coloured wooden toy recorder. No one had taught her; she simply picked it up and tried playing, learning just by playing. Watching her play, my mum told me how, as a child, I used to listen to different kinds of songs (including Western pop songs and Korean folk music) on my dad's record player. This suddenly brought back a memory of me performing pieces for students at Banksia Catholic School (a pseudonym) in 2009.

Con Brio: 2009

Please click on Yiruma's (2001b) '[River Flows in You](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

I was working as a CRT at Banksia Catholic School, covering Years 7 to 9 music classes. Prior to this CRT work, I had been unemployed for nearly eight months since obtaining my teaching qualification and VIT provisional registration. Consequently, this teaching opportunity (the first official employment as a graduate teacher in Australia) was very important for me. It was a starting point. Being unemployed for eight months was very tough, like walking through a pitch-black tunnel with no exit. I had no family support here in

Australia and felt utterly alone, even though I had some friends.

The teacher I temporarily replaced had left a description sheet for a Year 9 students composition assessment task. Students and I were to follow the suggested approaches to compose a pop song in binary or ternary form. The moment I held the description sheet in my hand, it seemed as though everything had already been given to me. It was a composition assignment, yet students could choose from several rhythm patterns, and some chords were already provided. Since the assignment involved learning binary and ternary forms, and the teacher could not supervise students for three weeks, they provided the rhythm patterns, lyrics, and other details as meticulously as possible. However, as a fellow music teacher, I found it rather stifling and frustrating, as if I had no freedom and was being advised to follow a set path. Perhaps my own situation mirrored this description sheet: my predicament of having to follow something created by someone else, rather than a lesson plan or assignment I had written myself. As I read through the description sheet, my stomach clenched and a headache started. My frustration and discomfort came from the fact that I only had three weeks at Banksia Catholic School and would become unemployed again, maybe for another eight months. I had come to Australia because I didn't want to copy and perform what others had produced, yet now I felt a sense of *déjà vu*.

"Miss, it is good that I learn how to make a melody from the chords I chose, but I am not so sure if it sounds okay."

"Miss, I don't know how to write the melody I come up with on the music manuscript. Can you please help me?"

So many students asked me similar questions. I decided to explain how to write music notation (covering the bass and treble clefs) so they could digest and copy the relevant notes on the manuscript themselves. I used two different approaches: the first was the traditional approach, which is how I learned to read music notation in Korea. It starts on Middle C, ascends to High C and descends to Low C across the treble and bass clefs. The second approach uses mnemonics to learn the notes on the treble clef, such as Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit (EGBDF) and FACE.

Despite my effort to help students, some were struggling to write down the notes of their melodies in the manuscript. Thus, I took the students to

practice rooms and asked them to figure out their melody on the piano. I also gave them the freedom to work in groups and walked in and out of the six practice rooms to help them write down their melodies. Some easily figured out the notes in their melody by paying attention to the notes they had chosen. They then quickly wrote the letter names, then went back to the classroom to look at the whiteboard and transcribe the notes they had written into music notation. I told them not to worry about the rhythm (or note values), as I would help them one group at a time.

Three weeks passed quickly. I explained the task, formed groups, retaught music notation, and supported students in creating chord progressions and melodies, and identifying the notes in their melodies. Each group progressed differently. Some continued working in the practice rooms to confirm and refine their melodies, while others were ready to transcribe the notation onto the manuscript. One group completed everything, including note values, and asked me to confirm whether their work was correct.

While working diligently, a couple of students said they wanted to listen to some ‘real, nice’ music.

“Miss, do you know Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’? Can you please, please play it for us?”

The moment I heard Yiruma’s name, I was astonished. It felt like my body sprang up like a coiled spring. *Wait a minute! How do students know the name of a Korean pianist who isn’t well known in Australia?*

Putting my curiosity aside, I said that I knew the piece and immediately prepared to play. In that fleeting moment as I sat down, I could feel the anticipation in the students’ eyes. At that moment, as I played ‘River Flows in You’ for the Year 9 students, I felt the weight of the keys, familiar yet strange (as I didn’t have a piano at home back then); my hands and shoulders began to move as if dancing. Different versions of me began to intertwine, engulfing me in a strange, indescribable emotion: the me in a Korean university practice room, laughing with friends over the same piece; the me living comfortably with my parents; the me struggling alone to find a teaching job in Australia; the me who is just a CRT, not completely belonging to this particular classroom, with Year 9 students; and the me feeling the silence after the music ended. It was a mix of nostalgia and bittersweet feelings.

Immediately after the performance ended, the students shouted “Wow!” and applauded. That was the moment when boundaries vanished: Australia and Korea, and the students and me. It was a moment when only ‘us’ and Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’ remained.

“What about ‘Kiss the Rain’, Miss?”

“That, I can do as well”, I replied with a smile.

After the performance ended, I asked the students, “How do you know Yiruma and his pieces? He is not so famous here, is he?”

The students vied with one another to explain. “Miss, ‘River Flows in You’ represents Bella’s Lullaby.” Bella is one of the protagonists of the *Twilight* saga and because of the series’ success, ‘River Flows in You’ was already a famous song among students.

* * *

On the train heading home, the acting principal called me. I hurriedly answered the phone. She apologised, but said she had just received word that the classroom music teacher would be able to return starting next week, so I didn’t need to come to school anymore. I thought *I didn’t properly say goodbye to the students*. In that instant, the faces of every Year 9 student flashed before me, and those moments when only the Yamaha piano, ‘us’ and ‘River Flows in You’ remained. Questions lingered in my mind: *Would the students wonder what happened? Would they remember me like I remember them?*

Having left the school without saying a proper goodbye, I came to understand and internalise the meaning of working as a CRT. I realised that after teaching a topic or topics at a school, I must return to my original place once the teacher who taught there comes back. I must know my place. Whatever my students and I shared while playing and listening to Yiruma’s pieces, and sitting and talking together, must remain just a moment in time.

What kind of music teacher do I want my students to remember me as? Will such an opportunity ever come? Will I have to work harder and excel more than others for that chance to come? If it never comes, what should I do?

Agitato: 2010

Please click on Smallwood's (2003) '[Total Praise](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

After teaching music for three weeks at Banksia Catholic School, in 2010 I was employed as a replacement music teacher at Hakea Catholic School (a pseudonym) for three months. I felt 'fortunate' to be employed because as someone from another culture, I felt like an outsider, a stranger, and that my musical training was 'other' to what was required to succeed as a music teacher in Australia. This school was located in a regional area of Melbourne, so I commuted by train. As a replacement teacher, I was asked to teach Years 7 and 8 students how to read and write music and to support Years 10, 11, and 12 students in identifying intervals and improving their song-analysis skills.

For the Year 10 analysis lesson, the music coordinator handed me the score of Richard Smallwood's 'Total Praise'.

"We're going to teach students to analyse the canonical sequence of the Amen section. Are you able to accompany this song in the next session? I will accompany it today, as you don't know the song yet."

The moment I first read the score, I found myself rapidly scanning the five flats, accidental signs (sharps, flats, natural signs), harmonies and chord progressions. My hands on my knees moved busily, as if I were actually playing the complex chord progressions intertwined with flats and natural signs in the score. As soon as the class ended, I rushed to the practice room. Sitting at the piano, I fumbled through the score.

Wow, how did Richard Smallwood come up with the chord progressions like this? It is so different from the music I've played and heard until now!

Although I didn't attend church every week, I felt at ease with the lyrics, which were comforting, and I thought I wanted to learn how to play gospel or jazz on the piano more proficiently. I had the thrill of the new harmonies and the confidence that, despite the difficulty of the song, I could learn them by reading the sheet music pretty quickly. My eyes ached from reading the notes with flats and accidental signs, and my back ached from leaning in closer to the score. Still, the beautiful and exhilarating sensation of the new harmonies, along with a

sense of relief that I possessed the skill to read the score and play it myself, made it worthwhile.

I quickly identified a sequence; the melody and harmony of the chorus rose higher and higher, evoking emotions in the singers, the piano accompanist and the audience.

Wait, were Year 10 students analysing this? It seems very difficult unless they could read music notation really well ... The students' score-reading skills must be high at this school.

I was glad to sing, accompany, and teach Gospel music and attend weekly Mass while I was working there. It was also natural for music teachers to use a four-part score (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) to teach students various songs. No one asked why 'Total Praise' was chosen to be analysed, or why it had to be a gospel song.

As I was the only teacher with an EAL background, my feeling of being a *sack of barley* often came back to me. I wanted to explain the chord progression and sequence using musical terminology, but I felt stuck because I couldn't convey what I wanted to say in English. The moment I tried to explain techniques or a definition, like a Picardy third, my face would flush and my throat would tighten. I aimlessly played a part of a melody on the piano to buy some time as a response to students' questions. The students' silence, their eye contact, and the clicking of pens made me think: *I have to explain the definition quickly. What simple words come to my mind now? Maybe I could just play it on the piano so students can understand it through the sound. They must not realise that I cannot explain properly. I am a teacher, and a teacher must teach well. I must not let the students know that I am struggling...*

Etude 5

Andante: 2010

Please click on Sakamoto's (1996) '[Rain](#)' and let it accompany you on this journey.

Every morning at 7.30 am, I waited for the train to Cherry Blossom State School, with a takeaway coffee in hand. As I slowly sipped my cappuccino, the train arrived. Commuters flooded out of the train, heading somewhere. I slipped

past them into an empty carriage in a pressed white shirt, black pants, and black loafers to teach what I love. My reflection in the train window brought a sense of pride and relief. And my mind turned to more difficult times when I was unemployed for several months; I quietly practised answers to anticipated questions on the way to the numerous job interviews I had endured.

Agitato: 2008-2009

Between December 2008 when I'd been awarded my teaching degree, and August 2009, I couldn't find any work despite enduring more than ten interviews at Victorian Catholic and state schools. After each interview, I desperately waited for a letter of offer. In my tiny one-room studio apartment, filled with trepidation, I tore open the envelope with the school logo embossed on the front. My neighbour's phone conversation buzzed like background static from the other side of the wall, an annoying distraction as I pulled out the letter and read the first sentence, my heart caught between hope and dread.

*Thank you for applying for a classroom music teaching position at XX College. **Unfortunately, you were not successful...***

The fragile hope I was holding onto turned into brutal despair in an instant as soon as I saw that devastating adverb, 'unfortunately'. This happened once, twice, ten, twenty times.

I failed again ... How many more times do I need to go through rejection? Will I ever be able to work at a school in Australia? Will waiting and trying ever be enough?

Overwhelmed by disappointment and despair, I felt all the strength drain from my body, as if I had been beaten. A mild headache, tightness in my throat, and my shoulders began to tremble as I cried.

Let's go for a walk ... This will pass. I will be okay. Nothing is impossible. One day, someone will hire me. I can do this. Don't give up easily.

On rainy days, I would wander the streets aimlessly when I felt miserable and lonely because the rain washed my face, and because crying on the street felt less lonely than crying alone at home. The sound of trams and people's conversations all seemed to drown out the sound of my sobs. I couldn't cry loudly in my small, poorly soundproofed apartment. I would sit in a corner of a small café and watch people walking past. Questions began circling in my mind:

What am I doing here? Should I go back to Korea? How many times do I need to get rejected before I work as a secondary school teacher?

Sometimes, I would make eye contact with a pedestrian and they'd smile. I found comfort in those moments, feeling less lonely and more connected.

Sforzando: July 2010

When I finally landed a permanent job as a classroom and instrumental music teacher at Cherry Blossom State School, after a long wait, it was like I had the whole world for myself. My heart pounded with a mixture of fear and excitement.

The music classrooms and practice rooms at the school seemed very different from those at the Catholic schools I had worked in before. When I opened the door to the piano practice room, I saw a digital piano sitting in the middle and tattered cotton padding peeling off the wall. Seeing the digital piano in a space mixed with other percussion instruments and ukuleles gave me a feeling somewhere between surprise and hope.

Accelerando: 2010-2013

Cherry Blossom State School was located in a low-socioeconomic area, a 15-minute walk from the train station. Each morning, I would walk past houses and shops closed off behind metal roller shutters and graffiti-covered walls. At first, I was fascinated by the shutters and graffiti, but they soon became familiar as I settled into my daily walk to and from school.

In my first years of teaching music at the school, I often felt like I was walking into a different world. The way non-music teachers and students viewed school music programs differed markedly from that of Banksia and Hakea Catholic Schools. Some VCE teachers of subjects other than music would ask students to stay in their classes rather than attend instrumental lessons, believing that what they were learning was too important to miss and more important than music.

The teaching at this school was all rooted in popular music (e.g., jazz and rock). Reading and writing music notation, and listening to and playing Western classical music were not emphasised. The school's unspoken norm seemed to be that students listened to what they wanted to play and copied

recordings by ear. I naively thought I could teach music to students the same way I had at the Catholic schools, by focusing on popular music (rather than Western classical music) while teaching them how to read and write music notation. In the practical sessions, I would ask students which songs they were interested in and wanted to learn, then transpose the songs to their level and demonstrate how to play them. At other times, I would print out sheet music and have them learn the songs by reading each note as some students preferred that way.

It was challenging for both Years 7 and 8 students to engage with music theory during classroom music sessions. We used a textbook in the theory sessions, and the very first topic they needed to learn was note values, such as minim, quaver and semiquaver. The school principal specifically requested that students thoroughly learn about note values, pitch, scales, and intervals. The principal reasoned that VCE music students who had previously chosen to do the VCE Group Performance at the school had achieved high performance exam scores but consistently received low written (theory) exam scores. A balance was needed, and if students understood the theoretical foundation from Year 7, they might be able to read and write notes, to some extent, by the time they reached VCE level. Thus, it would be easier for them to focus on the more complex aspects of music theory when preparing for the written exam.

I did not choose the textbook; it was already on the students' school learning material booklist. Because it was priced at around \$40, many parents either couldn't or didn't purchase it. In my opinion, shaped by my own schooling in Korea, students should bring their textbooks to class every day so they can work through the problems in them. However, as nearly half the class didn't bring them, I felt stuck from the very first lesson. I didn't know what else to do because at the time, I didn't yet understand the complex socioeconomic pressures many families were experiencing.

The students' attitudes and behaviours were also very different from those at the Catholic schools. At Catholic schools, nearly all students (based on my teaching experiences) were able to play the keyboard, violin or guitar. The majority of the students also knew how to read and write music notation. They were engaged in listening to and playing Western classical music, which made teaching so much easier for me. I explained the note values, pitch, scales, and

intervals for a bit, then asked students to answer questions from the textbook or the materials I prepared for them.

The Banksia and Hakea Catholic School students were well behaved; they raised their hands when asking questions, listened quietly, and handed in their work on time. No one walked around the classroom without permission or disrupted the lessons. I only ever gave one or two detentions in those classes.

Cherry Blossom State School was very different. Students in Years 7 and 8 repeatedly questioned why they had to learn to read and write musical notation. Some said it was boring; others began to disengage and become quite disruptive. They walked around the classroom without permission, crumpled up paper and threw it around, and talked so loudly that I had to stop and give them warnings constantly while trying to teach. The room often felt so loud that my voice could not be heard. After lessons ended, my voice was already gone; only a boiling, scraping metallic rasp lingered in my throat.

Most of the class time was devoted to classroom management. As requested by the principal, I wanted my students to learn and understand the theoretical foundation of music, so I became stricter about their behaviour. The stricter I became about the materials students brought to music class (e.g., the 'Don't Fret' textbook, a music exercise book, a pen or pencil and the student diary), the more disengaged they became.

As soon as class started, I began checking whether students had brought all the required materials, especially whether they'd purchased the textbook. Without realising it, I would sigh and frown whenever I heard, "Oh, my mum was really busy, so she couldn't buy it", or, "She probably won't buy it because she said music is not as important as English and mathematics. Sorry." Others asked, "Why do we need a textbook when we play instruments in music class anyway?" At times, my frustration escalated. Other times I felt like giving up. "I will check this again next week. You really need the textbook to learn. I can't photocopy the whole book!" Some students quietly said they were sorry. I didn't realise then how much my sighs, frustration, and unfriendly comments were shaping the mood of the classroom. Those students must have felt caught in the middle between their parents and me; some were unable to purchase the textbook due to financial constraints, while others didn't buy it because they and/or their parents undervalued music. But what must those

students have felt when they saw me sigh every week at the start of class, checking whether they had brought their book? Maybe they began to question more and more why they should learn to read and write music notation, or perhaps they started to have negative feelings about learning music in school.

I struggled to understand my students and their lives. I grew up poor, but my parents still bought my sister and me textbooks and school supplies. This, however, reflected my parents' values and the cultural norm in Korea, which I had internalised. I look back on how I imposed this standard on students and parents at the school. I admit that in the past, I didn't try to understand my students' circumstances. Back then, I thought I was being fair; now I see I was being rigid. Many of my students would have been chatting during theory classes, doing their homework for other subjects, and wearing their earphones. The room setup also presented challenges for teaching music. For example, there was a small music classroom where students studied theory. It was not very spacious. Three small two-person desks were lined up in a row, leaving just enough space for students to walk past. The room often felt too full and too small. The theory classroom had about 10 Apple Macs available for students to use with GarageBand and Logic Pro. Each computer was paired with a small MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) keyboard, so students could play the keyboard to record the song they wanted to produce. Sometimes students used the pre-recorded loops to create a song. An old, light brown upright piano greeted us right next to the entrance door. Because the theory classroom was right next to general classrooms for English, mathematics, humanities, and so on, loud playing on the piano or small percussion instruments often disrupted the classes.

We also had access to this spacious multi-purpose room (which we called the 'performance room' instead) for practical sessions. Although it was called the performance room, there was no stage. It was just an open space with about 70 chairs installed on the upper level, overlooking the area where a big screen was hidden in the ceiling. When needed, teachers pressed the button to raise or lower the screen.

Teachers of percussion, dance, and media studies used the performance room to teach their students. VCE students and teachers frequently used and requested the performance room for school-assessed coursework (SACs),

presentations, and parent-teacher interviews. At other times, the council nurses claimed the space for student immunisations, providing a suitable area for any students who felt dizzy after the shot and needed to lie down. It often felt as though the performance room was for everyone and no one as well ...

* * *

While at Cherry Blossom State School, I developed lesson plans based on the music curriculum and my experience teaching music at Banksia and Hakea Catholic Schools. However, I overlooked several factors: students' musical interests and preferences, the school culture, and the unique classroom setup. The schools I had worked at previously had well-soundproofed music classrooms, so students could play their chosen instruments freely, enabling both theory and practice to occur concurrently. The classrooms were equipped with smartboards, plenty of computers and desks, allowing students to apply what they learned in theory to practical work immediately. I would get up from my desk, walk with the students to the area where the instruments were displayed and stored, select instruments, and explain the practical activities. However, at the state school, the classrooms were set up differently. The theory and practical classes were separate. Since Years 7 and 8 students had two classes a week, I had to teach one theory lesson and one practical lesson. I felt it was like splitting the music in half, rather than connecting and integrating the two components. I often felt frustrated and torn between what I wanted to teach and what the space actually allowed. Because the performance room was often unavailable for classroom music (especially in the second semester due to the events I mentioned earlier), we often missed practical sessions. Each time we missed a practical session, I felt a small weight on my chest, knowing how much my students wanted to play instruments. Sometimes, after explaining the rhythm pattern from theory class, I asked students to create a rhythm pattern in groups using the notation we had learned, practise it, and present it to the class. However, opportunities for practical classroom work decreased, and students' interest in playing instruments and engaging with theory during the theory sessions declined just as quickly.

I was assigned to teach in a general classroom where no musical

instruments were stored. My students and I had to either make a couple of trips to the general classroom to grab ukuleles or other percussion instruments if we wanted to practise playing them. The way to and from the music instruments storage room next to the performance room was often troublesome because students kept talking loudly on their way there, disrupting other classes. Each trip felt like a huge risk that I did not want to take.

At other times, non-music teachers would complain that the noise level was intolerable as students played ukuleles or percussion instruments (and sang along to the song they were playing) in the theory classroom when the performance room was occupied for other activities. Because of the noise, when the weather permitted, I decided to take my students to the school oval to play small instruments they could carry safely. I often felt caught between wanting students to play and knowing that every sound we made disrupted someone else's class. On rainy or sweltering hot days, we had few options but to stay in the general classroom, working on music theory or watching movies to discuss the use of background music.

Back then, I was not familiar with any of the devices made by Apple Inc. I hadn't had a MacBook or an iPhone, and had never used GarageBand. However, the music coordinator specifically asked me to use GarageBand or Logic Pro in the music class, as students tended to like producing songs using them. I should have asked them to train me, but they were teaching at nearly the same periods in either the theory room or the performance room, so it was impossible. I watched the YouTube tutorials, but they were insufficient. I remember feeling small and embarrassed, trying to learn how to use the software programs; my students seemed far more confident navigating them than I was. To help myself and my students, I created an information sheet named 'How to Use Logic Pro' with step-by-step instructions with colour pictures of the apps, instructing which button to click to produce songs.

Tempo Rubato: December 2013

My husband and I went on a week-long trip to New Zealand's North Island to enjoy Christmas. On our way to Hobbiton, we decided to stop by Pak'nSave (a local supermarket) to grab some snacks. I was walking through the aisles looking for chocolates when two Māori boys, who looked to be in Year 7 or 8,

approached me with smiles. They waved at me and said something, but I couldn't quite understand what they were saying. *Why are they smiling and waving at me? Are they making fun of me?* Having had a tough time dealing with my students' behaviour in the music classroom over the past two years at Cherry Blossom State School, I suddenly found myself wearing my 'teacher' hat in an unexpected place. Sometimes, students mimicked my accent and intonation to express their frustration about having to learn to read and write music notation. I quickly passed them by with a stern expression. In that brief moment, one of the boys smiled brightly and said something to me again.

"Kia Ora!"

"Huh? Pardon?" I asked.

The boy kept his smile and repeated: "Kia Ora, Kia Ora!"

What does that mean? Why do they say this to me?

I automatically furrowed my brows and quickly walked toward the fruit corner where my husband was. I didn't say anything to the boys and just left them.

"What does Kia Ora mean?" I asked my husband.

"It means hello, welcome, or thank you. Did someone say it to you here?"

"Yes", I answered, but I didn't tell him what just happened. My face was turning red with embarrassment. *What did I do? Those boys might have just wanted to say hi to me, but I treated them rudely.*

It felt like I'd been hit in the head with a hammer. That interaction made me think about how I interact with my students and colleagues at Cherry Blossom State School. As a music teacher, I thought all I had to do was teach music. But then, I realised that my students are just like me, human beings with feelings and thoughts. They have their own struggles. But I viewed them as people to whom I needed to pass my musical knowledge. This experience came as a massive wake-up call for me. I only thought about what my students had done to me (mimicking my accent and not showing me respect as their teacher) and how it hurt me, but I failed to see what kind of teacher I was to them.

As I observed and met people throughout this trip, I noticed that some people spoke and behaved similarly to my students from the same culture. *A-ha! This may be their cultural thing; it was not that some students were disrespecting me ... It was just their way of communicating openly to other*

people, including me.

Liberamente: February 2014

The first music class at Cherry Blossom State School in Term 1, 2014 began right after we returned from New Zealand. Unlike the old days when I would say “Line up, please!” to the students, who stared with blank faces, I opened the classroom door with a smile. Since it was the first lesson of the year, I told the students that they could sit wherever they liked. Having graduated from primary school only a few months earlier, the Year 7 students sat upright and their faces reflected both excitement and nervousness. Some of the Year 8 students seemed slightly uneasy, others indifferent, as they had been in my class the year before.

Instead of checking textbooks and other materials like pens, notebooks and student diaries, I first asked them how their holidays were. Then I explained what we would be learning that semester, making sure not to forget to explain why we were learning it. The Years 7 and 8 students said they wanted to play ‘Hallelujah’, the original soundtrack (OST) from the Shrek movie.

“Why do you like this song?” I asked the students.

“Miss, I like it because it made me feel very relaxed. And it sounds beautiful.”

“Yes, yes! I like it because of the melody and the lyrics as well.”

“Can you teach us how to play this song on the keyboard or ukulele?”

“Okay, okay.” I quickly sat at the piano and started playing the song for them without providing any background information, such as who wrote it, what key it is in, the meaning of the lyrics, or what Hallelujah means. The beautiful melody, accompanied by gentle arpeggios, softly spread throughout the classroom. Some students hummed along to the melody, while others swayed as if holding an invisible microphone, singing as if on a stage. By the time the chorus part arrived, half of the students were singing ‘Hallelujah’ out loud.

Huh, are they actually singing? Wow, that’s something very unusual.

I kept checking each student’s face while playing to see if they were enjoying singing the chorus because, in the past, most of them had refused to sing together in class, saying, “Miss, singing is for primary students. It is not really cool! We’d rather play guitar or drums” or “Miss, can we use GarageBand

to produce some songs instead?”

These were the responses I had received the year before, and now I couldn't believe they were singing out loud.

When Hallelujah ended, small applause filled the room.

“Okay, let's play this on the instruments, but as we are in the small classroom, we can only use the MIDI keyboards connected to the computers, and ukuleles. Is that okay?” I said.

“Yes, let's do it!”

That day, we worked in groups, and all the students began learning the four chords (C Major, A minor, F Major, and G Major) on the ukulele. As they practised while humming the first verse, some students tapped the beat with their feet and realised on their own that the song was in 4/4 time. The shapes their fingers needed to make when moving from C Major to A minor, the rule of strumming every two beats—students taught each other these things as they practised, filling the classroom with their voices and movement. When students didn't understand something, they wanted me to sit next to them and demonstrate chords or strumming patterns.

“Oh, I get it now; thanks, Miss!”

Students were helping each other, accepting my support and showing appreciation. There were no debates or arguments about why we needed to learn the chord progressions and how to read them on paper. They were engaged in the activity even though they didn't have textbooks and weren't in a space where instruments were available.

The next day in the same classroom, we watched the ‘Hallelujah’ scene from Shrek. I didn't check if students brought their textbooks this time. A student quietly raised their hand and asked me what Hallelujah means. That single question sparked a conversation about the meaning of the lyrics.

In the past, I had avoided music with overt religious themes whenever possible. With so many already disruptive students in the music class at Cherry Blossom State School, I didn't want more conflict over religious music, as students came from diverse religious backgrounds. But this time was different. I briefly explained what Hallelujah means and why it was used in the song. Then I asked the students whether they could use GarageBand to find loops with a feel similar to ‘Hallelujah’ and create a song, but only if they wanted to. Another

option students could choose was to continue learning the chord progressions of 'Hallelujah' on the ukulele or the MIDI keyboard. Most nodded with confidence, and a few began recording melodies on the MIDI keyboard. During the process, several students realised they could see the notes of the loop they were listening to, and the activity naturally shifted into listening to the loop while simultaneously watching the music notation on the computer screen. Even though they couldn't read music notation, they said that seeing how the melody was visually shaped was interesting and somewhat helpful.

"Miss, what is this note? Why is it written like this?"

When these kinds of questions were asked, I paused and explained music notation. I also drew the notation on the whiteboard for those without the textbook. Some students opened their textbooks and began pointing at each note with their fingers, comparing them to the notes on the screen.

"A-ha! This is middle C, and ... it has two beats ... Oh ... minim has two beats ... Okay, that sort of makes sense."

The classroom began to buzz with students' voices, with unfamiliar but delightful moments of discovery. In the past, I believed the correct or legitimate sequence for teaching and learning music notation and note value was: using the textbook, understanding the music notation and note value, and playing the notation on an instrument to embody it. However, amid the classroom access issues, students who could not afford the textbook, those who had lost interest in music theory, and my limited understanding of their sociocultural backgrounds, something else was slowly emerging.

As I began teaching music differently in 2014, and I slowly came to understand my students' cultures and circumstances, the relationship between my students and me began to change. Through the curriculum content I included and the pedagogical approaches I adopted, I began to see my students as fellow lifelong learners in the classroom, carrying their own culture, history and perspectives on music. There were still challenges, but the students were no longer objects for me to manage or empty vessels for me to fill with my musical knowledge.

When I began to see my students as individuals, each with their own lived experiences and circumstances, their interests meeting and sometimes clashing with mine, and when I started to see us as in a learning community

shaped by tension and harmony, a shift occurred.

Intermezzo: April 2026

I write this intermezzo section in my house situated on a quiet street where only a few cars and pedestrians pass by; a place where I no longer have to worry about the neighbours hearing me sob. As I write this section, I realise that I'm becoming someone different. I'm still the person who walked the streets on rainy days to sob after rejection and who once sat alone in a café quietly, making eye contact with pedestrians for connection. And I now wonder, how many of my Years 7 and 8 students sat in the music classroom waiting for me to look at them and connect with them? I am becoming someone who tries to understand my students' cultures and the smiles of the Māori boys.

Instead of the piano keyboard, my fingers now move diligently over the laptop keyboard, yet my back still leans forward to see the screen better, just as I leaned forward to read the music score sitting in front of the piano. Having left behind the life of a piano player performing Western classical music, I have come to Australia, where I am a music teacher, teacher educator, and researcher. *Which path will I walk in the future? What kind of teacher or educator will I become?* There are many paths, and I will choose one to walk. I will move forward, always becoming.

Chapter 6. Discussing the Inquiry: Analytic Moments

In the previous chapter, I drew on the regressive and partial progressive moments of currere (Pinar, 1994) to describe my teaching and learning experiences. I now focus on thinking with and plugging my narratives into theory to understand how I have become the particular music teacher I am (and will become). This is because: “the past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package or a scrapbook ... we never leave it and it never leaves us behind” (Barad, 2007, p. ix), and telling my stories is not just “a telling of a past that is present, but the ongoing openness of the narrative to future retellings” (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 11).

Jackson and Mazzei (2011) spoke of theories working as machines: the theoretical concept becomes productive of data, and data become productive of theory in an emergent process. Neither explains the other; together they produce something new. In this chapter, my narratives plug into the following theories:

- ✚ critical pedagogy (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020)
- ✚ affect theory (Ahmed, 2014a; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014)
- ✚ Haraway’s (1988, 1991a) notions of situated knowledges and cyborg
- ✚ Barad’s (2007) notion of intra-action

Drawing on Jackson and Mazzei’s (2011, 2023) notion of thinking with theory, I did not use my personal narratives as stable data to be themed or coded. Rather, I perceived them as something “partial, incomplete, and always in a process of retelling and remembering” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262). In this sense, I treated my narratives as sites at which I thought with multiple theories simultaneously, drawing on my lived experiences to produce knowledge that could not be achieved with narratives or theories alone. Thus, my five narratives are seen as performative accounts, which function as “a political intervention of undoing problematic structures” (Pelias, 2019, p. 50) that strive to have “significance beyond the page” (Pelias, 2019, p. 49).

In my chapter on theoretical frameworks, I outlined critical pedagogy (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020) and affect theory (Ahmed, 2014a). In this chapter, these theoretical frameworks are not sequentially applied to my teaching and learning experiences; instead, I engaged in what Jackson and Mazzei (2013) described as “read-the-data [narratives]-while-thinking-the-theory” (p. 264) concurrently as a moment of plugging in to co-constitute one another to create something new (St. Pierre, 1997). According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “*plugging in* is a machinic process—when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (p. 4). Drawing on this articulation, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) argued that theories become machines for producing understanding and knowledge when they are connected to narrative moments. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Jackson and Mazzei (2013), my writing functions as a literary machine: it continually connects to theories, my memories and stories, alongside classroom materials, such as textbooks and instruments. Hence, I did not apply theory to narrative but instead plugged theory and narrative into one another to generate new understanding (St. Pierre, 1997). For instance, the Beethoven Piano School story does not exist as data, sitting there for theory to explain it. Rather, plugging theory into narrative generated new insights about how privileged and legitimate musical knowledge was reproduced (Apple, 2019) and circulated through my 10-year-old body as cultural capital (Ahmed, 2014a).

Thinking with theory rejects conventional qualitative data analysis in which narratives and stories confirm a theoretical stance. It instead implies that theory and narrative together produce new understanding, and that multiple theories work simultaneously (Mazzei, 2014)—that is, as an assemblage, “a process of making and unmaking things” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262)—to produce insights and reconceptualisation through their entanglement (Barad, 2007). For example, when Freire’s (2005) notion of the banking model of education was plugged into cultural capital (Apple, 2019; Bourdieu, 1984) and affective economies (Ahmed, 2014a) through the Beethoven Piano School moment, what was produced was not just that the banking concept occurred in my piano learning, that privileged and legitimate knowledge (such as Western

classical music, and reading and writing music notation) was distributed and that emotions such as frustration were attached to piano method books. Rather, plugging these theories concurrently in that moment produced new understanding, such as that the banking concept does not merely transmit musical knowledge but cultivates “affective orientations” (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014, p. 100) towards Western classical music and piano method books.

The ways I have taught music in Victorian secondary schools have been shaped by the banking model of education, cultural capital, power dynamics, and emotions/affects that have oriented my body. In other words, my 10-year-old body embodied privileged and legitimate musical knowledge and technical skills through the ways practising Czerny’s and Hanon’s exercise pieces felt, mastering performance techniques felt and experiencing perseverance and endurance felt. Western classical music as cultural capital operated through circulating emotions generated by the banking concept, an insight that cannot be articulated without both narrative and theory.

As I read my narratives through a lens of critical pedagogy and affect theory, I encountered moments where my assigned theoretical frameworks were somewhat insufficient. Reading my narratives through critical pedagogy and affect theory, which illuminate power structures, cultural capital and what my emotional responses to educational events do, enabled me to understand how my music teaching and learning experiences were shaped by binary tensions. These binary tensions are: traditional/contemporary music curriculum; formal/informal pedagogical approaches; teacher/student; theory/practice; classical/popular music; elite/non-elite; Catholic/state schools; personal/professional self; Korean/Australian cultures; Korean/English as languages; and privileged/marginalised.

Although Haraway’s (1988, 1991a) notion of situated knowledges and cyborg and Barad’s (2007) notion of intra-action were not introduced in the chapter on theoretical frameworks, these theories emerged naturally through the thinking-with-theory process in this inquiry. Here is what happened: as I read my narratives using a lens of critical pedagogy and affect theory, I encountered moments for which these two theoretical frameworks were somewhat insufficient. Reading my narratives through critical pedagogy and affect theory, which illuminate power structures, cultural capital, and what my

emotional responses to educational events do, enabled me to understand how my music teaching and learning experiences were shaped by the binary tensions noted above.

Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledges helped me acknowledge that these binaries are historically and politically produced positions from which I have learned, internalised and made sense of music education. Her concept of cyborg provided a way to challenge and collapse these binaries (Haraway, 2016). It did not function as an additional theory to be applied; rather, it enabled me to read my narratives and consider how my fluid subjectivity and unique positionality might challenge and collapse those binaries.

As I (re)read and analysed/interpreted my learning and teaching moments, I encountered another insufficiency. I found myself thinking that the music textbooks, instruments, classroom spaces, my music learning and teacher training and practice, and my emotional responses to educational events (e.g., school concerts) were all entangled and intertwined, creating and shaping the particular pedagogical approaches I implemented. In other words, I did not choose a pedagogical approach; rather, I implemented a particular pedagogy through the interplay of various elements (or materials), such as classroom space, instruments, textbooks, time, students' bodies, and my body. In this sense, Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action enabled me to see how elements (or materials) entangle and co-constitute one another, rather than acting as separate elements (or materials) that *interact*. For example, the music textbook was not just an object that contributed to my frustration and sighs, but also a textbook-as-gatekeeping-apparatus produced through intra-action of the banking concept, my emotional responses, students' apologies, school culture, and the school's low socioeconomic status.

In this way, the notion of cyborg (Haraway, 1991a) and intra-action (Barad, 2007) served as emergent theoretical lenses that helped a reading of my narratives that challenged the binaries that have shaped my becoming as a music teacher. This aligns with Jackson and Mazze's (2023) "back-and-forth-movement-of-plugging in" (p. 8) approach, which argues that additional theories (or concepts) may be required to further the thought process. As Deleuze and Parnet (1987) articulated, "it is rather when everything is going well ... that the crack happens on this new line ... you can no longer stand what you put up with

before, even yesterday” (p. 126). This ‘crack’ was what occurred during the analytical phase of *curre*.

In the next sections, my narratives are not analysed or interpreted as stable data appearing in sections or subsections. Instead, the narratives serve as sites at which different theoretical questions are posed (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), which allows multiple readings. For instance, my 10-year-old self practising the Czerny exercise pieces in the Beethoven Piano School appears in several sections of this chapter. Similarly, my belief that students bring the textbook to every music session appears across multiple sections to be read through multiple theoretical lenses.

As I move through four interrelated sections, I draw on narrative moments to examine how my subjectivity has been shaped by power dynamics, emotion/affect, and challenging binaries. The first section explores how my early music-learning experiences reproduced particular forms of privileged and legitimate musical knowledge. Here, I examine the banking model of education (Freire, 2005), musical literacy, and Western classical music as internalised hegemony (Apple, 2019), all of which shaped my early musical, affective orientation (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). The second section examines material-discursive-affective economies in classroom spaces (Ringrose et al., 2020). Drawing on moments of my early teaching experiences in Australia, I explore how classroom spaces include and exclude certain bodies (Ahmed, 2014a). The third section follows the moments when the binaries began to be challenged (Haraway, 1991b). I examine how teaching practices can unsettle and break the binaries and boundaries between classical/popular music, theory/practice, teacher/student and Korean/Australian cultures. The final section illustrates the process and moments of conscientisation (Freire, 2005) through my encounters with Māori boys in New Zealand and the moment of my Years 7 and 8 students singing ‘Hallelujah’ from *Shrek*. These moments show how I perceived the music curriculum, pedagogical approaches and teacher responsibilities.

Reproducing Legitimate Musical Knowledge

In this section, I examine which forms of musical knowledge have been

positioned as legitimate knowledge in secondary music education. This is not only a matter of “teachers’ musical taste, values, practices, skills and knowledge through music experiences” (Ripani, 2022, p. 274) but it is also deeply connected to the process by which educational systems, musical traditions, and emotional/affective experiences intertwine and entangle to privilege or legitimate certain musical knowledge. The following theories argue that knowledge in school education is not neutral:

- ✚ Freire’s (2005) critique of the banking model of education
- ✚ Apple’s (2019) cultural capital, selective tradition and legitimate knowledge
- ✚ Giroux’s (2020, 2024b) notion of the hidden curriculum

These theories were plugged into my music learning moments while in Korea (described in Etude 1) and highlight how specific pieces of music are reproduced as valuable, privileged and legitimate knowledge in piano and music education. Western classical music, musical literacy (the ability to read and write music notation) and advanced performance techniques are often presented as fundamental requirements of music education (Anh, 2010; Mills & McPherson, 2015; Reimer, 1989a), more specifically, what counts as knowledge (epistemology). These assumptions are accepted without question in the classroom.

This privileged and legitimate knowledge not only is *cognitively* understood and gained (in our mind) (Kress & Lake, 2018), but also circulates with emotions and attaches to bodies (Ahmed, 2014a). Emotions such as anxiety or a sense of accomplishment and pride make certain music feel like something to be learned and taught (Rauduvaitė & Yao, 2023) while other music is marginalised and excluded. In this process, Western classical music becomes a natural or neutral part of the classroom. In this context, I do not consider knowledge reproduction simply as an individual object that exists separately to be discovered. Drawing on Barad’s (2007) notion of intra-action, the music textbook, instruments, classroom spaces, my memories of teaching and learning and ways to practice and play certain musical pieces, and students’ responses to specific genres of music are entangled together and understood as an educational phenomenon.

The referenced phenomena are considered as “onto-epistemological entanglements, rather than as separate entities ... and are not reproducible, but differentially repeatable” (Sauzet, 2021, p. 160). Phenomena “do not occur at some particular moment in time; they are specific ongoing reconfigurings of *space-time-mattering*” (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 12). Thus, phenomena are emergent from the intra-action of humans and non-humans (Barad, 2007). In other words, privileged and legitimate musical knowledge can be viewed as a process in which materials, emotional/affective and political conditions are entangled and continually created and reproduced. In line with this argument, my personal narratives in this inquiry serve as sites of thought that show how legitimate knowledge is created, reproduced and justified in secondary music education.

The Banking Concept as Affective Disciplining

The Beethoven Piano School and university entrance audition moments were read alongside Apple’s (2019), Giroux’s (2020) and Ahmed’s (2014a) theory, whereby the banking concept is seen not only as a pedagogy that transmits knowledge to learners for passive reception but also as an emotional/affective disciplining that trains learners’ bodies and emotions in a specific way. For instance, hours of practice in preparation for university auditions in my high school music classroom in 1999 (described in Etude 2), the daily practice at the Beethoven Piano School, the repetitive patterns of Czerny’s and Hanon’s exercise pieces (described in Etude 1), the frustration and anxiety I felt when making mistakes during auditions, and the pride and sense of accomplishment I felt when mastering performance skills (both in Etude 1 and 2) were not just the process of passively learning and acquiring transmitted musical knowledge. My emotions, such as frustration, boredom and endurance, were embodied in my 10-year-old self (attending Beethoven Piano School) and 17-year-old (preparing for university auditions) self, who was willing to become a proper piano player.

Plugging in the Banking Concept

A standardised piano curriculum, in which learning pieces by Western classical composers (e.g. Czerny, Burgmüller, Hanon), was already in place in Korea. My piano teachers at the Beethoven Piano School instructed me, and I diligently

followed their guidance. Many questions—such as *Why did I have to practice Czerny's and Hanon's pieces? Why did universities require students to perform only Western classical pieces for entrance auditions? Why must I have learned only this type of music? Why did I have to practice for several hours daily?*—stayed in my mind, but I never asked the teachers these questions. Everyone learned piano that way, practised and auditioned that way; it was the way it was (status quo). Consider my description of the practice routine (in Etude 1):

Each evening began with scales; both hands moving together, ascending and descending in the rhythm patterns my teacher had shown me. Often, she demonstrated the long-short (dotted rhythm) pattern slowly, so I could understand before I tried it myself. Once warmed up, I moved on to other books. This sequence took about an hour, a routine repeated every day, along with private lessons with my teacher twice a week. The routine repeated day after day, unchanged, and unquestioned.

From the ways I was taught and practised, it seems that the piano teacher viewed the purpose of piano education as prioritising reading and writing music notations to cultivate aesthetic development and musical appreciation for the significance of music as a conduit to universal and eternal truth (Crooke, 2016; Regelski, 2003; Reimer, 1989b).

The core concept of the banking model of education that Freire (2005) criticised is that learners were viewed as passive knowledge recipients. I was not an active participant in contributing my thoughts to musical knowledge, but rather an object receiving already established, legitimate music (Apple, 2019). The piano teacher facilitated the standardised curriculum, and I simply followed their instructions. They assigned tasks, and I practised pieces repeatedly in a small piano practice room for a set period. The university audition judges or assessors evaluated my performances (which comprised Western classical pieces), and I accepted the results without questioning them. By receiving this type of education, my critical consciousness may have been minimised (Freire, 2005).

In my stories of the Beethoven Piano School and university auditions, the banking concept was explicit in the already-set standardised piano curriculum,

practice times, and audition evaluation criteria. Music as an act of learning and performing pieces on the piano was not something I learned independently as an active participant but something that was passed on to me as a passive recipient.

Plugging in Cultural Capital: What was passed on to me?

Apple (2004, 2019), drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital, suggested that the banking concept not only transmits knowledge to students but also privileges a specific type of knowledge (e.g., Western classical music) as central and legitimate. He argued that schools are not neutral in their selection of curriculum content but rather reflect and reproduce existing social inequalities by preserving and distributing what is considered "legitimate knowledge" (Apple, 2019, p. 6). The majority of the pieces taught in the Beethoven Piano School were written by European composers because "the interest and appreciation in traditional Korean music [and also popular music] was significantly diminished ... therefore, it was not part of the piano curriculum" (Cho, 2016, p. 24). Apple (2019) defined *selective tradition* as "that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture is always passed off as 'the tradition', the significant past" (p. 5). This selective tradition, in which certain meanings and practices are selected and emphasised while others are marginalised, describes the piano curriculum I experienced. The piano school's selection of Western classical pieces was not neutral, and it was a choice that placed:

- 🚩 Western classical music is at the centre of music and piano education
- 🚩 technical skills and performance proficiency as criteria for a proper and legitimate musician
- 🚩 European composers as the universal standard in Korea

This selective tradition may not have existed solely in the piano curriculum. It may also have existed in **conversations** (among my fellow piano students, my teachers and me), **expectations** (from me, my parents and my teachers), and **evaluations** (for university auditions).

To become a good piano player, I must master Czerny's and Hanon's exercise

pieces. To play piano properly, I must be able to read and write music notation and play Western classical pieces flawlessly (Etude 1).

These messages implicitly presented Western classical music not only as a type of music but also as piano music itself. Cultural capital, such as good taste, certain kinds of prior knowledge, abilities and language forms and manners, is “usually distributed throughout society, and this is dependent in large part on the division of labour and power in that society” (Apple, 2019, p. 31), in other words, the field (Bourdieu, 1984). Families who could afford to send their children to a piano school were those who had a certain level of financial means. They could afford lessons, owned an upright or grand piano at home and had the time and financial resources to practise for a set period each day. Learning Western classical music was not just about learning music; it was about cultural belonging to a particular field, habitus and doxa (Bourdieu, 1984; Fetokaki, 2023).

Plugging in the Hidden Curriculum

Giroux (2024b) defined the hidden curriculum as those “unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the [everyday] routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (p. 41). At the Beethoven Piano School and in the high school music classroom for preparing for university auditions, the hidden curriculum of “patience and discipline, and achievement” (Giroux, 2024b, p. 43) circulated through my body.

For “patience and discipline” (Giroux, 2024b, p. 43), I had to practise Western classical pieces every day. They were perceived as valuable, privileged and legitimate (Bull & Scharff, 2021; Chen, 2025; Drott, 2013) because they were serious, difficult to learn and not accessible to everyone (Allsup, 2016; Philpott, 2017; Philpott & Kubilius, 2015). Access to Western classical music can also be shaped by socioeconomic circumstances, as learning a musical instrument often requires financial resources for instruments, related materials and private/group lessons (Trienekens et al., 2024). These costs may create unequal opportunities for participation and make sustained instrumental learning more accessible to students from socioeconomically

advantaged families (Green, 1999; Stevens, 2002). In this sense, access to legitimate and privileged musical knowledge is also connected to material and economic conditions, rather than simply to individual musical ability or effort. Within this context, ‘practice’ was something I had to do even though I felt frustrated. This level of hierarchy was not clearly taught, but I learned it through the music I was exposed to (Jeanneret & Wilson, 2016). Repetitive practice for several hours was tedious because I had to endure discomfort in my fingertips, wrists and shoulders, and while finding the right posture, but I needed to be patient. If I wanted to become a proper, professional piano player, to play every note correctly, and if I wanted to study Western classical music at a university, I would have to endure hours of repetitive practice (Ward et al., 2025).

For “achievement” (Giroux, 2024b, p. 43), playing the piano properly or professionally means practising alone in a room, performing alone on stage and being evaluated by and measured through predefined forms of assessment (Giroux, 2020). Unlike ensembles or improvisation in jazz, collaborative playing and musical creation in playing Western classical music were not a given. Performing any piece flawlessly was measured by individual technical perfection (Zhang et al., 2025). Giroux (2024b) articulated that “schools, like other institutions, appear to exist in the accounts beyond the somewhat questionable imperatives of capital and its underlying logic of class, race, and gender discrimination” (p. 43). At the Beethoven Piano School and in my preparation for university auditions, I not only acquired performance techniques but also the values, attitudes, and tastes of the upper- and middle-classes through Western classical music (Stevens, 2002). This is what made me someone who wanted to become a proper musician and, at the same time, someone who excluded other possibilities, such as improvisation, ensemble, learning popular and traditional Korean music, and playing music for pure joy.

Plugging in Affect Theory

When reading my narratives critically through the prism of Freire (2005), Apple (2019) and Giroux (2020), the banking model of education is understood as a knowledge-transmission process, cultural capital as distributed through selective tradition, and hidden curriculum as the delivery of patience and discipline, and achievement. A different understanding of how the banking

concept operates emerges when reading alongside Ahmed's (2014a) affect theory. In other words, the banking concept can be seen as affective disciplining or training in which learning is not only perceived abstractly and structurally but also as a means of disciplining/training the body and emotions.

Ahmed (2014a) argued that emotions work to "shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies" (p. 1). At the Beethoven Piano School and in the music classroom, while preparing for university auditions, my body learned not only performance techniques but also what it felt like to be a proper musician. The excerpt below from Etude 1 clearly illustrates this:

I found Hanon's and Czerny's exercise pieces somewhat dull. Some pieces seemed quite repetitive. I clearly understood that the purpose of the exercise books was to help learners develop specific finger techniques. But the more I practised, the less the melody resonated with me, and I felt mechanical, robotic, a practice machine rather than a person who enjoys learning music ... I didn't share my frustration with the teachers; instead, I patiently endured it by practising them like a machine, hoping to move on to the next piece quickly.

Drawing on Ahmed's (2014a) perspective, this experience was not for the sake of repetitive practice. My body was emotionally learning to become a proper musician. First, I learned to tolerate and endure discomfort and frustration. I learned to endure mechanical repetition patiently, even when it felt boring, frustrating and uncomfortable. The message that '*to become a proper musician, to play the Western classical pieces on the piano, I must endure boredom and discomfort*' was not just conveyed cognitively but was etched into my body, from the piano keys to my fingers, through the daily grind of boredom and frustration. Moreover, the fact that '*I secretly disliked certain exercise pieces but didn't tell my teacher about it*' (from Etude 1) implies that I was learning to express myself appropriately; a proper musician, or a learner who aspires to become one, does not complain but perseveres. Patience is also embodied as an affective habit, demonstrating that it is not only a recognition of its importance but also a natural, ingrained response.

In contrast, the excerpt from Etude 1 resonates with Ahmed's (2014a) articulation that "emotions accumulate over time, as a form of affective value"

(p. 11). I expressed joy while practising Burgmüller's pieces:

Burgmüller's bright and charming melodies made me feel so happy ... Even though some sections were challenging, and I knew that I needed to practice more; I gladly embraced it.

Burgmüller's pieces were connected to positive emotions, such as joy and a sense of accomplishment. These emotions attached to Burgmüller's pieces and went beyond making them 'happy music'; they made Western classical music as a whole feel worth learning and achieving. Meanwhile, Hanon, Czerny and the pieces selected for university auditions were closely linked to discomfort, patience and a mechanical (machine-like) feeling, and were given the emotional meaning of something that '*I must endure*', that is necessary to '*become a proper musician*'. Discomfort itself came to be felt as part of legitimate/privileged musical knowledge and learning (Campbell, 2010). In this sense, I argue that the banking concept not only transmits the traditional knowledge and hidden values of Western classical music but also elicits an affective orientation (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014) towards Western classical music by making specific music, along with specific emotions and feelings, viscerally attached to the body.

My 10-year-old and 17-year-old selves understood legitimate/privileged music not only intellectually but also emotionally/affectively. This became clear when I thought about how it felt to practise Czerny's exercise pieces and Beethoven's sonatas (uncomfortable and frustrating because of the advanced performance techniques required to master those pieces), how it felt to practise Burgmüller's pieces (joy and a sense of accomplishment) and how it felt to persevere in practising for hours every day (mentally challenged, physically tiring but something natural to become a proper musician).

Plugging in Intra-action

When I read my narratives with/in the practices of cultural capital, selective tradition, legitimate knowledge (Apple, 2012, 2019), hidden curriculum (Giroux, 2020, 2024b), and affective economy (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a), and Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action, I began to see a revelation of educational phenomena that shaped my teaching and learning experiences, which

reproduced the inequalities in music education. Through this process, these theories helped me reflect on my lived experiences to generate knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997). A thought I encountered during this thinking process was that I perceived pedagogical approaches through a human-centric lens. I thought that 'I', as a human being, always chose a pedagogy and curriculum content to teach in the classroom. 'I' chose certain pedagogical approaches, but 'I' was also influenced by other factors (or elements), such as:

- ✚ frequent classroom changes (e.g., no access to the performance room, so I had to move musical instruments to the theory room, and deal with other teachers' complaints that the music lessons were too loud);
- ✚ broken air-conditioning on a boiling hot day, and students sitting in a cramped room with no energy to pay attention to my explanation of 'intervals';
- ✚ students not purchasing the music textbook, which hindered their learning progress; and
- ✚ the school culture that appreciated popular music.

This made me question the following: *Do I always choose and control non-human elements (listed above) in my classroom when teaching, or do non-human elements also influence humans (me and my students) and shape how we teach and learn in the classroom?*

Barad (2007) contended that entities (or elements) do not pre-exist independently and interact with one another; rather, they are co-constituted through their encounters. In other words, the difference between *interaction* and *intra-action* is that interaction refers to existing entities that influence one another, whereas intra-action refers to the process by which entities are simultaneously created through their entanglement (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). Barad (2007) argued that ontological frameworks that have dominated Western thought—that is, Cartesian heritage, which is premised on “separation [and distinction] from the world” (Davies, 2020, p. 47)—are “apparatuses of thought that ignore the natural intimacy and proximity of the universe” (Ringrose et al., 2020, p. 5). Building on this argument, Barad (2007) claimed that humans are entities (or elements) that intra-act with non-human entities (or elements), and that entanglement reveals how ‘cuts’ materially and discursively separate

matters, entities (or elements) from one another. She added that humans and non-humans make meaning together, which she refers to as *mattering* or *materialisation* (Barad, 2007). It is because “knowing is not a practice apart from the world, because we are of the world” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 89). As Barad (2007) stated, “Practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use non-human elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part” (p. 185). In other words, “we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; therefore, we know as a result of our being in the world” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 92).

Jackson and Mazzei (2023) highlighted “how the dynamic materiality of [human and non-human] bodies and practices plays an active role in the working of power” and how subjectivity can be “understood as entangled with other things” (p. 88) and other human and non-human bodies. Barad (2007) also viewed *apparatus* as “the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of *mattering* [humans and non-humans making meaning together] as they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 89). In this context, an apparatus enacts *agential cuts*, which are “part of the production of phenomena, making certain enactments possible and others impossible” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 90). Barad (2007) conceptualised these materials, agential cuts and apparatuses as “part of the production of material-discursive practices that produce phenomena” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2020, p. 90).

At the Beethoven Piano School and during preparation for university auditions, legitimate musica knowledge was not a predefined, pre-existing concept but a phenomenon that was an entanglement of material-discursive-affective elements through intra-action (Ringrose et al., 2020). For example, piano keyboards, repetitive patterns from Czerny’s and Hanon’s exercise pieces, hours of practice to master technically difficult passages of the selected audition pieces, the ticking sound of a metronome, a tiny practice room space, the sound of other students practising their pieces, finger muscle memories engraved in my fingers, proper posture and physical fatigue were material elements. The banking model of education, cultural capital, selective tradition (e.g., Western classical music), and hidden curriculum (e.g., patience and

endurance to become a proper musician) were discursive (discourse) elements. Discomfort and boredom from repetitive and mechanical practice, perseverance, a sense of accomplishment and pride from mastering pieces I liked, and anxiety about making mistakes during stage performances or at the university auditions were affective elements. All these material-discursive-affective elements were entangled and intertwined to co-constitute a phenomenon, that is, Western classical music as the legitimate music that I needed to acquire. Through these intra-actions, I came to know Western classical music as legitimate music (a selected tradition in piano education), and, in doing so, I became a teacher who treated it as music itself. In this sense, my experiences show that onto-epistemologically, my “[practice of] knowing and being were not isolable, but they are mutually implicated” (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

Musical Literacy as a Gatekeeping Apparatus

Since the 1880s, musical literacy, which is the ability to read and write musical notation (Donn & Elphick, 2024), has been considered a crucial skill that students need to acquire through school music education in Victorian schools (Stevens, 2002). The premise that every student should be able to read and write music notation may seem like a neutral requirement. However, as discussed in the previous section, the banking concept privileges certain musical knowledge, and access to that knowledge is unequally distributed in school education (Apple, 2019). In this vein, musical literacy is not merely a technical skill but also serves as a powerful gatekeeping apparatus that determines who has access to privileged musical knowledge and who is excluded.

This section examines how musical literacy has served as a gatekeeping apparatus within the musical education systems in Korean and Australian schools, and how I went from existing in the periphery (marginalised as a migrant from a minority cultural background in Australia) to the centre of authority in the music classroom (who created boundaries between students who were welcomed and excluded).

Auditions in Korea

At university entrance auditions, the so-called ‘anonymous’ performances conducted behind the velvet black curtain were presented as fair and impartial (see Etude 2). However, the anxiety and discomfort I felt revealed that this was anything but fair because I only had a year to prepare for the auditions. Other students had been preparing for the auditions since middle school (i.e., for at least three years), and some had even received private lessons from renowned pianists or retired professors.

Drawing on Ahmed’s (2014) metaphor of the comfortable chair, certain bodies (that are already comfortable with the imprint of the chair, that have accumulated and embodied years of piano lessons and practice hours) arrived at each audition already well prepared. This does not merely represent ‘acquiring advanced performance techniques’ but the embodied result of years of economic investment. Apple’s (2019) argument for an unequal distribution of cultural capital in school education becomes clear here. Musical literacy requires objectified capital (e.g., private or group tuition, musical instruments, method books, a space in which to practise). This objectified cultural capital enables the ability to read and write music notation and to acquire advanced performance techniques, which, in turn, provide access to institutionalised cultural capital (e.g., certificates and acceptance to study music at prestigious universities). Students without objectified cultural capital are screened out before they even begin (Trienekens et al., 2024).

The anxiety I felt, because of my perception that I did not possess the advanced performance techniques to be accepted at elite, prestigious universities in Seoul, was not merely a personal emotion. When I read the audition story through Ahmed’s (2014a) affect theory, I recognised that my anxiety was a process of discerning who belonged where. My body felt that the ‘elite university’ was not a space for someone like me, who had prepared for auditions for only a year, and the feeling of unpreparedness was the embodied affective orientation (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014) of institutional inequality and the unequal distribution of cultural capital (Apple, 2019).

Music Textbooks in Australia

In Cherry Blossom State School, the music textbook was required for students.

Every Monday, I checked whether students had brought their textbooks (see Etude 4). Some students without the textbooks apologised or complained, and they might have felt ashamed or annoyed. My responses to their apologies were deep sighs of stress, frowns and growing frustration and irritation. Here, again, my emotional responses were not merely personal feelings (Ahmed, 2014a). They created a boundary between the students who brought their textbooks and those who did not, and created a boundary, or affective orientation, that distinguished who belonged to the category of ‘proper music students’ and who did not (Ahmed, 2014a). One student confessed that their mother had said, “*Music is not as important as English and mathematics, so the textbook is not necessary*”. What did this student feel when passing on their mother’s words to me? Moreover, the school principal’s request to improve theory test scores to prepare for the VCE final music examinations led me to implement a theory-centred approach to teaching. Until then, I had taken for granted that ‘proper music education’ consisted of learning through reading and writing music notation on sheet music. I never imagined that some students could not afford textbooks, and I labelled them as ‘unmotivated and disengaged’ in my class.

Freire (2005) warned that “the oppressed [have] internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines” (p. 47). In Korea, I was admitted to a Group B university based on criteria such as my ability to read and write music notation, my performing techniques, access to piano method books, and space to practise. However, in Australia, I unquestioningly reproduced the same logic: that proper music education requires proper materials, techniques, and musical literacy. I was unconsciously participating in reproducing power structures within music education (Apple, 2019; Aubrey & Riley, 2024). This is what Freire (2005) referred to as ‘cultural invasion’:

The invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group ... they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression ... the invaders mould; those they invade are moulded, the invaders choose; those they invade follow that choice, or are expected to follow it. (p. 152)

In the context of my music teaching and learning experiences, I imposed my embodied middle-class values on students from different social classes in Australia, specifically, that ‘proper learning’ requires appropriate materials (including music textbooks) and perseverance, without understanding the realities of their situation and cultural backgrounds. In Korea, this norm worked for me because my parents had some financial means to support the purchase of textbooks and the cost of piano lessons, and by doing that, they shared their educational values and beliefs. However, at Cherry Blossom State School, this norm became constraining, causing discomfort and excluding some students.

In the past, I was a technician; instructions were given, and I complied without questioning them. A theory-centred curriculum required textbooks, so I demanded that my students provide them. I checked the textbook every week without considering why they were necessary to learn musical literacy, or who this textbook-checking routine excluded and marginalised. I did not see the socioeconomic, cultural and political dimension of the curriculum and instead blamed the students and their parents. Giroux (1985, 2024a) distinguished between teachers who work as:

- ✚ technicians (those who implement the curriculum without questioning its political dimensions); and
- ✚ transformative intellectuals (those who critically reflect on the political implications of their educational choices).

What My Emotions Do

In Etude 5, I wrote: *‘I used to sigh with a frown when students had not brought their textbooks. My frustration grew.’* Ahmed (2004) argued that “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities (or bodily space with social space) through the very intensity of their attachments” (p. 119). My deep sighs and frowns were more than expressions of disappointment, disapproval and frustration. They created a boundary between students with textbooks (labelled as motivated and engaged) and those without (labelled as unmotivated and disengaged). The impression attached to those without textbooks was that they were unprepared and did not take music in school seriously. My sighs shifted the classroom atmosphere to disappointment and disapproval, making some of

my students without textbooks feel unwelcome, uncomfortable and excluded.

Material-Discursive-Affective Entanglements

When several students apologised for not bringing the textbook, they may have felt ashamed or rejected. Faced with my sighs of frustration and disapproval, students likely sensed they were being labelled inadequate and they may have accepted the label without question. My frustration defined belonging and exclusion. In other words, structural inequality (Apple, 2019) was implemented by me as a teacher-technician (Giroux, 2024a) through the banking model of education (Freire, 2005) operating through my frustration and sighs (Ahmed, 2014a). Reading the story of the student who passed on their mother's words alongside Ahmed's (2014a) affect theory, those words do not actually suggest that they looked down on music as a subject, but rather that the student and their mother had to prioritise subjects perceived as more important (e.g., English, mathematics, science) within limited resources. My sighs and frowns, and my weekly demands for textbooks, cast the students and their families as those who do not (or do not know how to) value music education.

When reading my narratives through Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action, the textbook is not an independently pre-existing, neutral object. It is the phenomenon of textbook-as-gatekeeping-apparatus, which was produced through the intra-action of the material-discursive-affective elements (Ringrose et al., 2020). For instance, the textbook and its price (around \$40), theory-focused notation exercises and questions written in the textbook, students without textbooks labelled as unmotivated and disengaged, and my teacher-self positioned as the centre of authority, and the textbook-checking routine carried out and validated were material elements. Discursive (discourse) elements were the banking model of education, selective tradition (that proper music learning requires textbooks), and institutional expectations and requirements (students need to improve their theory test scores). Affective elements included my frustration, disapproval and sighs, as well as students' feelings of shame and annoyance.

These material-discursive-affective elements did not exist separately and interact with one another. Instead, they co-constituted a single phenomenon created through an intra-action. My textbook-checking routine may seem like

my personal choice as a teacher, but it was not. My actions, which are the values I embodied while learning piano at Beethoven Piano School, Cherry Blossom State School principal's request, my sighs (an affective force circulating through the music classroom and my students) and the students' apologies and annoyance created a material-discursive-affective phenomenon through this entanglement (Barad, 2007). What emerged when thinking with Barad (2007), alongside Apple (2019), Freire (2005) and Ahmed (2014a), was that these are not separate elements but a material-discursive-affective entanglement in which economic barriers, assumptions, institutional pressures, and emotions/affects work together to create the gatekeeping apparatus, that is, the music textbook.

Musical literacy and advanced performance techniques are not neutral knowledge and skills (Apple, 2019) but rather devices that create boundaries. They operate through cultural capital and economic barriers (Apple, 2019), institutional expectations and practices (Giroux, 2024b), and affective orientation (Ahmed, 2014a; Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014), all of which are materially-discursively-affectively intertwined (Barad, 2007).

What is crucial is that I reproduced the very gatekeeping apparatus—that is, “boundary-making practices” (Barad, 2007, p. 148) because it “specifies an agential cut that constrains and enables that which is possible [included] and that which is impossible [excluded]” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 89)—that had screened me out. In Korea, the ability-grouping apparatus (e.g., musical literacy, performance evaluations) assigned me to a university in Group B, marking me as ‘less talented’. At Cherry Blossom State School, I sorted my students using the textbook-checking apparatus, which enabled me to identify and draw boundaries between the motivated and the engaged, and the unmotivated and the disengaged. The gatekeeping apparatus worked with the same logic: “material-discursive practices that enacted who [or what] mattered and who [or what] was excluded from mattering” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 89). Realising this, the following questions emerged in my mind:

🌈 Why did I reproduce this ‘textbook as gatekeeping apparatus’ unknowingly?

- ✚ Why did it feel natural and necessary to check textbooks every week, demand that students acquire musical literacy, and sigh and frown when students did not comply?

Internalised Hegemony

The answer to these questions can be found through hegemony—that is, “an act to saturate our very consciousness ... so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the *world tout court*” (Apple, 2019, p. 4). In other words, hegemony is the process by which a dominant group maintains inequality through saturation rather than coercion (Apple, 2019). I internalised the logic that justified my reproduction of the banking concept and gatekeeping practice. In consequence, I accepted the hierarchy of which music, which students and which teachers were considered legitimate, and most worthy (Pinar, 2023).

When applying to universities in Korea, I chose a university in Group B. Group A universities, although not located in Seoul, were highly renowned, so-called elite local national or private universities. Groups B and C were the next level. In my personal narratives, I acknowledged that I had only one year to prepare for auditions. Others began preparing for the auditions in middle school, and some even received lessons from retired university professors or attended special performing arts high schools. I probably would not have been selected to attend an elite university. On the surface, this seemed like a realistic judgment to apply to less competitive universities in Groups A, B and C. Technically, I was allowed to apply to elite universities in Seoul. However, I did not apply because I had already internalised the message that people like me would not be accepted in that elite space. Choosing a university in Group B felt natural and rational. I thought I had realistically considered my performance techniques, audition preparation period and geographical location. In reality, however, I had already accepted my position within the hierarchy as I knew where I belonged (Freire, 2005).

Reading this with Ahmed’s (2014) notion of affective orientation, I realised that ‘knowing my place’ was not only occurring through understanding but also affectively (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). Although I was well aware that I could apply to an elite university in Seoul (Group A), I felt uncomfortable about

it. A sense of inadequacy and inferiority oriented my body and thoughts towards Group B and C universities located in or near my hometown. The elite and prestigious universities at which future elite musicians studied Western classical music felt like unwelcoming spaces (or an uncomfortable chair). I felt that I was not welcomed as someone who could not acquire the performance techniques they already possessed, and applying to universities not in Seoul was an emotional expression of my internalised class position: ‘knowing where I belong’.

At Cherry Blossom State School, I deliberately excluded gospel and jazz from the music classroom (see Etude 5). Although I had confidently taught gospel songs like ‘Total Praise’ in Catholic schools (see Etude 5), I avoided doing so in the state school. In Etude 4, I wrote: *‘I thought students wouldn’t engage ... I felt the gospel was inappropriate because of students’ religious diversity’*.

I assumed that students would not be interested in any religious music other than their own, so I considered introducing gospel songs to be unsuitable. This assumption was rooted in my fear of complaints, that teaching religious music may encounter “cultural tensions from families and communities” (Dong et al., 2025, p. 8). I also realised that I had viewed my students as unable to handle complex, privileged music as they lacked prior musical knowledge and were inadequately prepared. In doing so, I also neglected the “cultural and theological significance embedded in the music” (Dong et al., 2025, p. 7). This internalised hegemony, operating as a hidden curriculum, was never explicitly mentioned, yet it influenced my pedagogical choices, such as avoiding gospel and religious music and emphasising theory and musical literacy instead.

As noted above, Freire (2005) contended that those who are oppressed have internalised the image of the oppressor and follow their guidelines. I experienced university class hierarchies in Korea and excluded myself from elite and prestigious spaces. In Australia, I applied the same hierarchical logic to my students at Cherry Blossom State School. Following Apple’s (2019) and Pinar’s (2019, 2023) insightful and critical arguments, I participated in the process of determining whose knowledge is most valuable and legitimate. My assumption that state school students would be disengaged with and struggle to handle complex music was not merely a personal view but internalised,

hegemonic thinking that naturalised the unequal distribution of cultural capital based on class (Apple, 2019). I assumed these students lacked access to certain forms of cultural capital and excluded them accordingly.

When reading the gospel exclusion story through Barad (2007), internalised hegemony was not merely a thought in my head; it was enacted through material-discursive-affective entanglement (Ringrose et al., 2020). In Korea, my decision to apply to and study music at a Group B university was shaped by one year of preparation time, the limited number of lessons my parents could afford, and living in a small city where elite university professors were inaccessible (material elements). The discursive (discourse) elements that elite students prepare for in middle school and receive lessons in from retired professors circulated through these constraints, making me feel overwhelming anxiety and a sense of *'I don't belong in elite spaces'*. This feeling was not something personal or psychological (Ahmed, 2014a) but ingrained in my body, refusing the idea when I imagined applying to Group A universities, either in Seoul or elsewhere, and manifesting as physical discomfort that made it feel impossible to actually apply.

In Australia, my reluctance to introduce gospel songs to students at Cherry Blossom State School emerged from a similar entanglement. The school's limited resources and the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of its students provided the material context, while the discursive context was that students lacked prior musical knowledge and were neither prepared nor interested in complex music. Affectively, I felt anxious that students would not engage or respond, a concern accelerated by their disengagement and religious sensitivities. The institutional pressure of the theory-focused requirements from the school principal, along with my lack of confidence in facilitating class discussions (on the history of gospel and social implications), also shaped what felt possible and impossible to teach.

These material-discursive-affective elements were inseparable because they co-constituted my 'decision' and 'choice' to avoid and exclude gospel and other religious music in my classroom (Barad, 2007). As Barad (2007) noted, "agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world" (p. 141). Choosing a Group B university and not introducing gospel songs were not my individual decisions but educational phenomena—that is, internalised

hegemony enacted through the entanglement of material and discursive elements, affective orientations and my bodily sensations. In short, I embodied the banking concept in Korea, reproduced the textbook as a gatekeeping apparatus in Australia and internalised the hegemonic rationale that justified it all. I learned to exclude myself and reproduce the exclusion of students; that is, to “reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible” (Barad, 2007, p. 177).

Material-Discursive-Affective Economies

In the previous section, I interrogated what I had internalised through music (piano) education in Korea, such as the banking concept, music notation and the textbook as a gatekeeping apparatus. These were not only cognitively understood but also were intertwined within the specific material-discursive-affective entanglement of secondary music classrooms. Drawing on my teaching experiences at Banksia and Hakea Catholic Schools and Cherry Blossom State School, I examined how I facilitated the banking concept under different material-discursive-affective elements, yielding different outcomes. An important question to ask is: *are pedagogical approaches, teaching practices and the inclusion of curriculum content a matter of teacher choice, or do material-discursive-affective elements shape experiences, opening or closing educational possibilities?*

The Un/Comfortable Chair

At Eucalyptus Catholic School, I used the banking model of education by demonstrating the melody of ‘Lah Rumba’ on the xylophone, and the students imitated my demonstration (see Etude 4). After several rounds of demonstration and practice, students were able to play ‘Lah Rumba’ flawlessly. In this sense, the lesson worked. My narrative illustrates the material conditions (from Etude 3): *‘A spacious and bright music room ... sufficient xylophones ... comfortable chairs.’*

These material conditions played a crucial role in shaping affective experiences. In a conversation with Schmitz (as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter), Ahmed (2014) described a comfortable chair as one designed to “receive bodies that have already given that shape and impression

to the world” (p. 101). Ahmed (2004) also argued that comfort allows certain bodies to feel that they belong in a particular space. In the context of Eucalyptus Catholic School, students could sit and learn comfortably in a music classroom equipped with chairs, a smartboard, and sufficient musical instruments (30 xylophones and various orchestral instruments), eliminating the need for students to wait for a turn or feel excluded. The spacious room maintained a comfortable temperature (cool in summer and warm in winter), enabling students to practise without physical discomfort. In addition, students already knew how to navigate music classrooms; the (nearly) always-accessible music classrooms allowed students to practise individually and/or in groups, and I, as a teacher, did not need to make last-minute changes to my lesson plans.

These material elements worked together to create an affective classroom atmosphere. The students, who were from upper- and middle-class backgrounds, had access to private or group music lessons, and were accustomed to cultural capital, such as spacious spaces in which they could concentrate comfortably and the ability to play various musical instruments. They fit well into this space. As a music teacher, I also felt like a natural fit. In this environment, the banking concept appeared to work, given that the students watched my demonstration, followed along and practised. I interpreted this as a measure of my teaching ability.

However, reading this teaching moment through Barad (2007), the successful ‘Lah Rumba’ lesson was not the result of my personal teaching ability, but the intra-action of the entanglement of material-discursive-affective elements. The chairs, the smartboard, the xylophone and other orchestral instruments, the space with a comfortable temperature, my body and the students’ bodies, and the affects (comfort, concentration and a sense of belonging) that circulated through all of these co-constituted this particular educational phenomenon (Barad, 2007). Within this entanglement, the banking concept *worked* because the material conditions supported it and, more importantly, because the students’ bodies were already well suited to the space (the comfortable chair).

In contrast, the banking model did not work in Cherry Blossom State School, because *‘students were disengaged ... walking around the classroom without my permission, talking loudly ... I had no choice but to spend most of*

my class time on classroom management. I was exhausted' (from Etude 4).

What was different, and why did the banking concept not work? Regarding the material elements, this state school had cramped classrooms, a single performance room with limited access, and no xylophones or other orchestral instruments. Instead, there were approximately 30 ukuleles, a few electronic keyboards, bass guitars, drum kits, and small tuned and untuned percussion instruments.

My discomfort while teaching at Cherry Blossom State School was not merely an unpleasant sensation. Rather, it represented a mismatch and misalignment between my body and the students' bodies, space and objects (musical instruments). At this school, the uncomfortable, worn-out chairs, desks and speakers, without an installed air-conditioner or heater to maintain comfortable temperatures for studying music, signified my students' bodies constantly moving, changing postures, sitting and standing, and fidgeting. These were likely the students' ways of expressing their discomfort. The absence of the xylophone and other musical instruments suggests that students had been taught theory-centred classes without opportunities to apply their learned knowledge to actual instruments (practice), making music theory seem abstract and inaccessible. The small, cramped music classroom, with students sitting close together, which led to conflict and ultimately forced me to devote most of my time to classroom management.

These material conditions may have created an affective atmosphere of discomfort, frustration and, potentially, exclusion. The state school students' bodies did not fit into this space where I tried to teach Western classical music and musical literacy, and they expressed their discomfort and dissonance through movement (such as walking around, talking loudly, standing, and fidgeting). However, I interpreted this as students' disengagement and disruptive behaviour. I did not see how material conditions played a significant role in producing this disengagement (Jiang, 2025; Kiatkheeree, 2018).

Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action clarifies that student disengagement at Cherry Blossom State School was not a problem of the students themselves. It was a phenomenon resulting from the interplay between uncomfortable chairs, uncomfortable room temperature, the lack of various musical instruments, a cramped classroom, theory-focused classes, the

banking model that I used, my own frustration and disapproval, and the emotions of discomfort and exclusion that circulated through all of these (Ringrose et al., 2020). Further, these differences in material conditions were not neutral (Apple, 2019). The Catholic schools where I worked were privately funded, so they had more materials, resources and spaces available. In contrast, the state school operated on a limited budget and enrolled students from diverse sociocultural and religious backgrounds. The unequal distribution of materials and resources reflected and reproduced the unequal distribution of cultural capital (Apple, 2019). Students who had access to 30 xylophones and orchestral instruments could read and write music notation, and play instruments in private lessons. However, those who did not have access to instruments could not read and write music notation or play instruments, and had to 'learn' theory first. This was the material manifestation of class-based educational inequality.

What this reveals is that curriculum content and pedagogical approaches cannot be separated from material-discursive-affective entanglement. The reason that the banking concept *worked* in Catholic schools and *did not work* in the state school was not due to the intrinsic value of pedagogy itself (the ways I taught music to students), but rather to the material-discursive-affective entanglement it created. Traditional educational discourse, which does not refer to "linguistic or signifying systems, grammars, speech acts or conversation" (Barad, 2007, p. 146), but is defined as what counts as meaningful statements separates pedagogy from material conditions. Good teaching is manifested through the teacher's pedagogical skills, content knowledge and passion (Allsup, 2016), which is a human-centric view (Haraway, 2016), while material-discursive-affective conditions are considered as a mere background. However, following Barad (2007), I reject this separation. For example, I felt like a good music teacher at Banksia and Hakea Catholic Schools because lessons were taught smoothly. However, at Cherry Blossom State School, I felt like an incompetent music teacher because students seemed disengaged and unmotivated (or I labelled them as such), and I was frustrated that lessons were not taught smoothly as planned. However, I now realise that the good and the failed or bad teaching was not a matter of my personal teaching abilities but rather different reconfigurings of the material-discursive-affective entanglement I

was a part of (un/comfortable chair) (Barad, 2007). This also explains why the banking concept internalised in Korea manifested differently in Australia. I attempted to implement the same curriculum content and pedagogy at the Catholic and State schools. However, the material-discursive-affective conditions and contexts differed, resulting in distinct teaching and learning experiences.

This section has interrogated the ways the classroom, as material elements (e.g., chairs, space, instruments, students, textbooks), created an affective atmosphere that opened or closed possibilities for teaching practice (Barad, 2007). Some objects, however, accumulate specific affective value over time (Ahmed, 2014a), thus becoming a gatekeeping apparatus (Barad, 2007). In that sense, the next section examines how the music textbook functions within this affective economy. The textbook became an affective object that included my attempt to satisfy institutional demands and expectations, my sighs, students' discomfort, and their parents' perceptions of school music programs. How and why did this happen?

Sticky Objects

Ahmed (2014a) argued that "objects become 'sticky', and can read as sites of personal and social tension" (p. 11). Reading this with my narratives, at Cherry Blossom State School, I required students to bring their music textbooks, manuscripts, and a pencil every week. As soon as the bell rang, I began checking whether they had brought their textbooks and required materials. Some students apologised for not bringing their textbooks and manuscripts. I sighed with a frown, and my frustration grew each week (see Etude 4).

On the surface, these moments appeared to reflect a reasonable requirement that students should bring their textbooks to class. However, these textbooks cost approximately \$40, which could be a significant investment for some families. Moreover, these textbooks, fully packed with about 100 pages of music theory questions, symbolised a theory-centred learning geared towards academic success. This suggests that the textbook was more than just a collection of paper and ink. It was a textbook for an undervalued subject worth \$40, yet it was a material intersection between the school principal's request (that students need to learn how to read and write music notation from Year 7),

my own internalised beliefs that *‘proper music education requires textbooks’* and *‘proper students bring all the required materials’*, and the students’ economic circumstances. Further, to add Ahmed’s (2014a) concept of sticky objects, the textbook was something that accumulated affective value because it was checked weekly.

Ahmed’s (2004) notion of affective economies explains how the music textbooks functioned. They were not pre-existing (Barad, 2007), neutral objects (Apple, 2019) and affective value was accumulated (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014) through the following cycle:

Me: Did you bring your textbook along with other materials? (Authority).

Student: No, I am so sorry ... My mum won’t buy me the textbook ... She doesn’t think music is as important as English or math. (Apology, justification, feeling stuck, and probably shame?).

Me: (Sighing and frowning ... Disappointment, frustration, disapproval).

Other students: (Watching this moment ... feeling nervous, anxious, thinking, ‘I didn’t bring the textbook either ... Will she do the same thing to me?’).

Each week, this cycle was repeated, and the textbook accumulated more emotions/affect. For the students, this created feelings of inclusion or exclusion. For me, it created feelings of frustration, disappointment and disapproval, a sense of being undervalued and unappreciated by the students and parents and/or guardians. Moreover, for the entire music classroom, it created tension and anxiety, and maybe the fear and frustration of the weekly textbook check-in period.

Ahmed (2004) argued that “emotions circulate between bodies” (p. 117), creating surfaces and boundaries. In this context, the music textbook was not merely a book but was a powerful gatekeeping apparatus (Raj, 2026) imbued with my frustration, disappointment and disapproval; my students’ anxiety, tension and shame; the principal’s expectations; the students’ and their parents’ or guardians’ perceptions that ‘music is not that important’; and the textbook’s price.

So, then, were textbooks pre-existing entities, or did they become a phenomenon? When this textbook-checking routine moment is read through Barad (2007), the textbook was not a pre-existing entity; rather, the phenomena

of a textbook becoming a 'gatekeeping apparatus' occurs through an intra-active entanglement of material (price, paper and ink), discursive (proper music education requires textbooks; music is seen as an undervalued subject in school education; theory-focused lessons are important; the principal's request; students without textbooks are labelled as disengaged, unmotivated, inadequate bodies; and the economic circumstances of working-class families), and affective (my sighs and frustration, the students' anxiety, classroom tension) elements.

These elements were co-constituted through entanglement: the price of the textbook was not inherently high but created conflict within the economic circumstances of a working-class family (which subjects to prioritise and which books to purchase) and my Korean background (which internalised middle-class values). My sighs, which I repeated weekly, became the affective force that produced student anxiety and tension in the classroom.

Apple's (2019) concept of cultural capital explains why I had come to situate the music textbook as a powerful gatekeeping apparatus. The textbook is, I suggest, a perfect example of Bourdieu's (1984) concept of objectified cultural capital, both as a material object and as a device of class selection. Students who had textbooks were perceived as engaged, motivated and prepared; as students who valued music; and as deserving of my class. Conversely, students who did not have textbooks were labelled as disengaged, unmotivated and unprepared; as students who did not value music; as having limited access to the curriculum content; and as undeserving of my class. As Apple (2019) argued, school education contributes to class reproduction through the unequal distribution of cultural capital. In this context, although textbooks were a natural expense for middle-class families, for some working-class families, they were a barrier that forced them to choose between music and English, mathematics or science. Further, when I checked the music textbooks weekly, sighed at students and assumed that '*proper music learning requires a textbook*', I was unknowingly justifying and reproducing class-based hierarchies.

One thing to consider here is why it felt natural for me to check and demand the textbooks weekly without questioning this practice. This reflects internalised hegemony (Apple, 2019). However, the classroom dynamics were

not shaped only by the material-discursive-affective entanglement; my past lived experiences also came into play. Consequently, the next section explores how my experience as a culturally marginalised pre-service teacher left affective, migrant wounds that determined what types of music I taught (and avoided teaching) in the Catholic and state schools.

Migrant Melancholia

My experience as a pre-service teacher continued to ripple through my teaching practice and is what Ahmed (2004) has labelled as the ‘rippling effect of emotions’. Ahmed (2004) argued that this connects the past and the present: “the rippling effect of emotions moves sideways (through sticky associations between figures and objects) as well as backwards (as repression always leaves its trace in the present); hence, ‘what sticks’ is also bound up with the ‘absent presence’ of historicity” (p. 120). Following Ahmed (2004), I explored how my migrant memories, which are the experiences of moving to Australia and the resulting linguistic discomfort and inadequacy, remained as a persistent wound, haunting my educational and pedagogical choices (Derrida, 2012).

Etude 2 documents my experience upon arrival in Australia in the mid-2000s. I had lived with my parents and younger sister in Korea, but I was alone in Australia, about 8,300 km away from them. This was not only about physical distance but also about affective, relational and cultural disconnection (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019). In Etude 2, I wrote: *‘When I visited my [Korean] university, I rode a bus and passed through a familiar street. But it no longer belonged to me. Familiar streets, familiar buildings, yet somehow, something had changed. I felt like a tourist in the place where I grew up. I shed tears. I didn’t belong anywhere. I was a stranger.’*

In her book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Ahmed (2000) explained the notion of a stranger as someone who is in a national space, but does not belong. In other words, a stranger is both belonging and not belonging. As a Korean migrant in Australia, I was:

- ✚ simultaneously here (living, working, studying) and not here (as I am longing for my parents and sister 8,300 km away)
- ✚ Australian and Korean

- ✚ belonging (in my profession and family) and not belonging (as a cultural minority)

Ahmed (2010) argued that migrants carry (affective, family) histories, which are emotional attachments to past places, practices and actions, and people. These histories haunt the present and shape how I perceive, act and teach (Derrida, 2012). The wound I described in Etude 1 that will probably never heal over the course of my (and my mum's) life is what Ahmed referred to as melancholia—that is, an ongoing grief for and failure to let go of what has been lost, what “cannot be reconciled” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 158).

As articulated in Etude 3, the ‘sack of barley’ metaphor that I used to describe my days at Oceanview University, studying the initial teacher education course, is a Korean expression describing someone whose mouth is sealed and unable to speak. That someone was me, an individual who had thoughts but could not express them freely, who wanted to participate but could only remain silent, who just sat quietly and listened. This moment was not a mere uncomfortable, unpleasant memory; it was a wound. It was not just a language barrier; it was an inability to engage in the learning space, to understand and participate in fast-paced discussions in the university classrooms. I wanted to speak, but I could not. My thoughts were in my head, but I could not express them quickly, fluently, and properly. I chose to remain silent. Ahmed (2014a) noted:

shame requires an identification with the other who, as witness, returns the subject to itself ... the view of this other is the view that I have taken on in relation to myself; I see myself as if I were this other ... in shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other. (p. 106)

I saw myself through the eyes of other university students, a mere sack of barley, a quiet student. My silence (as an act of face-saving) was an escape and withdrawal from a space in which my inadequacy could be exposed (Choi, 2015). I remained silent to avoid being exposed for my linguistic inadequacy, judged and labelled as an incompetent pre-service music teacher. Silence made me feel somehow safe, yet it also made me feel like an incompetent

individual. This sense of *'I am not good enough, my English-speaking skills are inadequate, I cannot explain things quickly, confidently and flawlessly'* circulated my body. It was not just a difficult memory; it was a scar from an experience that was imprinted on my body and left an emotional mark.

This migrant wound is not stuck in the past but has shaped my present behaviour. The Kia Ora greeting from the Māori boys during my trip to New Zealand (which I misread as mockery, as described in Etude 5) and my response exemplify this. I later realised that it may have been curiosity and a gesture of welcome. Even more painfully, I treated them as I feared my students would treat me. I misread their gestures and attitudes and simply reacted without attempting to understand their sociocultural backgrounds. This was a “mirror” (Freire, 2005, p. 73). Freire (2005) explained that the banking concept “mirrors oppressive society as a whole” (p. 73), just as the teacher’s objectification of students reflects broader structures of oppression. Similarly, my objectification of the two Māori boys as cultural others repeated the very objectification I feared—that is, my accent being mimicked, my cultural difference being misread. I was simultaneously the centre of authority and marginalised in the classroom. In that very moment, I experienced in my own body what I had been doing to my students.

These migrant wounds have shaped my pedagogical approaches, albeit unconsciously. My longing for Korean orderliness was rooted in my frustration with the behaviour of state school students. In Korea, students are expected to sit quietly, follow teachers’ instructions and show respect towards them. However, at Cherry Blossom State School, students talked loudly, walked around without my permission, and questioned and challenged my instructions, which frustrated me deeply.

My memories of disciplined piano training in Korea led me to expect similar discipline from my students. I practised Hanon and Czerny exercise pieces every day, without questioning or complaining. I expected my students to have similar discipline (Oleson & Hora, 2014). When they asked why they should learn music theory, I interpreted it as disrespect, but I realised that it was actually a yearning for my Korean training that had been internalised and embedded in me.

I also longed for the respect I felt for my Korean teachers. Whenever

students at the state school challenged me, questioned me or talked back at me, I cringed, feeling irritated. In Korea, teachers were authority figures, so students did not challenge them but complied. When students at the state school challenged me, I felt uncomfortable and very irritated. This was cultural displacement, which is a lack of the respect structure to which I was accustomed. Ahmed (2004) stated that “the sideways movement [of emotions] works to stick objects together ... is shaped by [past] multiple histories, which remain alive in the present” (p. 126). The multiple histories of my piano training, living with my parents and my cultural background were with me in the music classroom, haunting and shaping my pedagogical practices.

Derrida’s (2012) concept of hauntology and Barad’s (2007) concept of temporality demonstrate that the past is not simply over but functions like a ghost in the present. Reading the Kia Ora greeting moment through Barad (2007), it is not that the past influences the present but rather that the past and present are intra-actively entangled. Barad (2007) argued that “time and space ... are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future” (p. ix). In this sense, my migrant wounds are not something that I had in the mid-2000s. They are still present and haunting me, attached to my teacher-body, in my pedagogical choices and in my emotional responses to educational events.

Korean piano training (ingrained in my fingertips and the standardised piano and music curriculum), migrant wounds (living 8,300 km from my parents and my inadequacy to teach music in English in the past), my struggle (being labelled as an incompetent pre-service teacher and navigating cultural differences), the music classrooms (with students with various levels of cultural capital, different school contexts, attempting to meet institutional expectations and demands), the banking concept (embodied and internalised in me) and other elements of which I am not yet fully aware do not exist independently, nor are they separable. My piano training in Korea is not a thing of the past, because it still lingers on my fingertips. Migrant wounds are also not something in the past, as they still contribute to shaping my pedagogical choices in the classroom. The past does not influence the present from back there; instead,

the past, present and future are intertwined, entangled within my teacher-becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). My migrant wounds are not only psychologically aware but also a material-discursive-affective entanglement (Barad, 2007). These elements are intertwined, producing the sense that *'I am a proper musician, student, pre-service teacher and classroom music teacher'*. This sense became a wound that *sticks* to my body, circulating and moving with me from the Oceanview University classrooms to Catholic and state schools, to my classroom where I work as a teacher educator.

Freire (2005) argued that the oppressed are at risk of internalising the image of the oppressor and thus becoming the oppressor themselves. Throughout my studies at Oceanview University, I internalised messages that I was linguistically inadequate and unable to participate actively in discussions. In addition, at the state school, I unconsciously reproduced and distributed this internalised logic to my students. The previous sections illustrated this logic through musical literacy as a gatekeeping apparatus, and my migrant wounds add another layer here. I felt my own limitations, and this sense of inadequacy shaped how I related to my students, even though I was not fully aware of it.

This section has shown how the banking model, musical literacy, the textbook as a gatekeeping apparatus, and internalised hegemony were materially, discursively and affectively enacted in music classrooms. The next section examines moments when the binary views I had taken for granted, particularly those related to music, were challenged and collapsed. These moments, or cracks (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987), were brief and unexpected, but they opened up new possibilities (Barad, 2007).

Challenging Binaries

Haraway (1991b) articulated the persistent dichotomies or binaries in Western traditions, such as self/outer, mind/body, animal/human, public/private, culture/nature and whole/part. She argued that we are "living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system ... simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies ... from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks" (Haraway, 1991a, p. 161). In other words, our thoughts are divided by binary oppositions

that appear natural yet are politically constructed and serve specific interests. In this section, I introduce Haraway's notions of situated knowledge and cyborg to complement and supplement critical pedagogy and affect theory to think beyond binary logic. Freire (2005), Apple (2019), Giroux (2020, 2024a), and Ahmed (2014a) illuminated power structures and affective economies and orientations, but these may at times reproduce oppositions and binaries (e.g., centre of authority/being on the periphery, elite/working-class, comfortable/uncomfortable, classical/popular music, theory/practice, teacher/student, Korea/Australia, and personal/professional self), not because they are insufficient but because their analytic focus often leans on oppositional critique. In this sense, I plugged my narratives into Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge to reject the god's view of seeing "everyone and everything in the interests of unfettered power" (p. 581) because knowledge is situated, partial and embodied. I also use Haraway's (1991a) notion of cyborg—that is, a metaphor to describe our ontological condition as humans entangled with technology, imagination and material reality; a hybrid, a boundary-crosser or a site of multiplicities—to embrace the collapse of boundaries or binaries (Haraway, 2016). Binaries reject traditional notions of wholeness and unity (Haraway, 1991a). Haraway (1991a) positioned the notion of cyborg as a "deconstruction of the discourse/reality dichotomy" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 87). In this section, I explore two moments in which binaries were challenged and collapsed in my teaching practices at Cherry Blossom State School.

Hallelujah Moment

The binary of classical music and popular music as curriculum content is a fundamental distinction in my music education, and this binary structured my pedagogy. At Beethoven Piano School, I studied and performed only Western classical music; popular music and traditional Korean music were not considered *proper* music for inclusion in the standardised piano curriculum (Cho, 2016). University auditions also required a Western classical repertoire, demonstrating that only by reading and writing music properly and embodying advanced performance techniques could one become a proper musician. The 'Lah Rumba' class taught at Eucalyptus Catholic School also shaped my pedagogy, because it taught students to read and write music and practise

proper techniques on xylophones.

When analysing Western classical music and gospel songs in Banksia and Eucalyptus Catholic Schools, I felt comfortable. Even at Cherry Blossom State School, where the principal requested that students read and write music, play their instruments *properly* and prioritise Western classical music, I felt comfortable. In my experience, the binary was very clear: Western classical music was considered ‘serious, valuable, proper and educational’ (Allsup, 2016; Philpott, 2017; Philpott & Kubilius, 2015). In contrast, popular music was considered easy, entertaining, inappropriate and of low educational value (Wright, 2015); yet it was also considered popular by students. This hierarchy was something I had internalised at Beethoven Piano School. Etude 5 documents the moment this binary collapsed: *‘The students [at the state school] asked, “Can we learn how to play Hallelujah from Shrek?” I was astonished. It was the surprise that came from the students wanting to learn willingly. I paused for a moment and thought, “Why not? Let’s try it!” From that moment on, everything changed.’*

My ‘Hallelujah’ learning moment was not merely a disruption of binaries but a crucial moment in which all theoretical dimensions were entangled through intra-action:

- ✚ from the banking model of education to problem-posing education (Freire, 2005)
- ✚ popular music as legitimate knowledge (Apple, 2019)
- ✚ a shift from myself as a teacher-technician to a transformative intellectual (Giroux, 2024a; Giroux et al., 1988)
- ✚ a shift in the affective atmosphere of the music classroom (Ahmed, 2004)
- ✚ breach of the classical/popular music binary (Haraway, 1991b, 2016)

For example, at Cherry Blossom State School, I implemented a formal pedagogy to develop lesson plans in advance (Folkestad, 2006; Wright, 2016). Then, I explained the content to my students according to those plans. Students followed my instructions by answering theory-based questions from the music textbooks, and practising pre-selected songs. In other words, I provided students with Western classical music, theory and content that I deemed valuable. However, when students asked me, *‘Can we learn “Hallelujah”?’*, it

was a problem-posing moment. They questioned the curriculum content and proposed what they valued. According to Freire (2005), teachers and students learn and grow together in a problem-posing approach, and this shared learning occurred in the 'Hallelujah' moment. The students proposed, I agreed, and we sang and played the song together. In that very moment, I was no longer a teacher who transmitted the legitimate musical knowledge to students but a teacher-learner, a boundary-crosser (Giroux, 2024a; Haraway, 1991a).

When students suggested learning and singing 'Hallelujah', I also thought, *'these questions shifted me from a technician who uncritically implemented a given curriculum to a transformative intellectual, albeit imperfectly and cautiously'*. At that time, I did not know what this shift meant.

In the past, Western classical music was my answer to Apple's (2019) critical question: 'Whose knowledge is most legitimate?' However, by singing 'Hallelujah' with my students and facilitating spontaneous activities on the spot, I unexpectedly began to challenge the hierarchy that I had internalised. Incorporating popular music into the curriculum and teaching it using informal pedagogy was not only about 'including and imparting what students like'; it was also about challenging the unequal distribution of cultural capital (Wright, 2015). In the previous sections, I wrote of welcoming certain students while excluding others by privileging Western classical music and musical literacy. Including 'Hallelujah' was about validating a different kind of musical knowledge, one with which students were familiar. From Haraway's (1988) perspective, the curricular and pedagogical binaries of classical/popular music, teacher/students, theory/practice, and formal/informal pedagogical approaches were challenged in this moment. 'Hallelujah' was simultaneously a popular song with poetic lyrics, a harmonically analysable structure, and one that students knew and loved. So, is 'Hallelujah' merely a popular song, or is it something more than that? Moreover, who produced these binaries?

In the earlier section on affective economies, I described the affective atmosphere of the Cherry Blossom State School music classroom: uncomfortable temperature, discomfort, frustration, disengagement, my sighs, irritation, and students' shame and annoyance. However, when we sang 'Hallelujah' together, the affective atmosphere changed. There was laughter and excitement. Students helped each other to learn to play the song. Some

suggested, *'let's play this chord this way, that rhythm like that way'*. I watched them, feeling proud and hopeful.

Ahmed (2004) explained that emotions and affects shape the surface of the body. In the 'Hallelujah' moment, joy, curiosity and passion circulated through the students' bodies and my teacher-body, orienting us differently. We became bodies playing instruments and singing, helping one another and playing music together. This special moment signified an affective entanglement of the classroom space (Barad, 2007). Barad (2007) explained how all these pedagogical, curricular and affective dimensions worked together. The entanglement of my body and my students' bodies through 'Hallelujah' was not merely a matter of choosing different pedagogies, curriculum content and type of music; rather, it was a result of the students' requests and engagement, my piano accompaniment (an embodied cultural capital), ukuleles and keyboards (the musical instruments [or materials] available that day), a double-period (sufficient time to listen to, learn, and play and sing 'Hallelujah') and the students' enthusiasm for peer learning (pedagogical approach).

Teachers make pedagogical choices and take actions, but these cannot be understood merely as autonomous individual acts separated from non-human elements. Rather, a teacher's choices and actions occur within the entanglement of human and non-human elements (e.g., students, teachers, curriculum, classroom space, musical instruments, time, weather, the body, and affect) at a specific moment (Barad, 2007). For example, a teacher may change a preplanned lesson based on factors such as classroom temperature, a malfunctioning air conditioner, or the students' physical or emotional conditions or concentration levels. In this sense, teacher agency is not separate from the intra-active process but emerges through the relational entanglement of human and non-human elements.

Within the same moment, students looked at a computer screen and understood the structure of 4/4 time using GarageBand (see Etude 5). In other words, the GarageBand program (as an element, active participation) is what Barad (2003) explained as non-human agency: "matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" (p. 828). In this moment, multiple human and non-human elements (the students, me, the instruments, GarageBand, the

classroom space, the time) participated together to produce that particular learning phenomenon. In other words, 'Hallelujah' as a pedagogical moment was a phenomenon, produced through the intra-active entanglement of all these elements. These elements did not exist separately in advance but became through this specific reconfiguring (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012). All theories also work together through intra-action. For example, Freire (2005) described the pedagogical shift from the banking model to the problem-posing approach, and Giroux (1985, 2024a) described the shift from teachers-as-technicians to teachers-as-transformative-intellectuals. In addition, Apple (2019) described legitimate knowledge and selective traditions (popular music as legitimate knowledge), and Haraway (1991a) described binary collapse (formal/informal pedagogy, classical music/popular music/, both/and). Finally, Ahmed (2004) explained affective orientation, and Barad (2007) explained how all of these work together through intra-action. Individually, they are insufficient. Without Freire (2005), I miss the pedagogical dimension; without Ahmed (2004), the affective dimension; without Barad (2007), material participation; without Haraway (1991a), binary collapse; and without Apple (2019) and Giroux (1985, 2024a), I would miss the political dimension. This is the moment when binaries collapsed; all theoretical frameworks worked together to produce the transformative moment.

So, then, what does all this (classical/popular music, formal/informal pedagogy, the collapse of the teacher/student binary, the interplay of theoretical dimensions) say about me? Who am I as a teacher who embodies the banking pedagogy, reproduces it and simultaneously begins to challenge its binaries? I am not a stable identity but a continuous process of becoming.

Teacher-Becoming Moment

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of haecceity is crucial to understanding this ongoing process of becoming. I am a teacher-in-this-moment; a reconfiguring of time, space, relationships and affects. In the 'Hallelujah' moment, I was a problem-posing teacher (Freire, 2005). The students' requests, the GarageBand, the keyboards and ukuleles, the performance room space, the double-period, my courage to do something different and say, 'let's try it', and the students' laughter and enthusiasm co-constituted me as a problem-posing

teacher. In the next lesson, in the small theory classroom, with uncomfortable desks and chairs, in front of students without the textbook, I was once again in the state of frustration, a different reconfiguring—a technician sighing, checking the textbook and practising the banking model once again (Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2024a). Teacher-becoming does not mean an identity that changes from a good teacher to a bad, inadequate teacher (and vice versa). It is a fluid subjectivity: not a fixed essence (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Vicars, 2016) but an entanglement of moments, a reconfiguring of relationships and space-time-mattering (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012), an ongoing becoming (Gannon, 2022; Vicars, 2016).

Teachers are expected to display emotions such as enthusiasm, encouragement and empathy and are encouraged to conceal emotions such as frustration or stress (Chang, 2009; Nath & Pandey, 2025). However, when I accompanied my students at Banksia Catholic School on the piano, my personal love of piano music became apparent. In Etude 4, I noted: *‘Students’ smiles, cheers, and applause filled the music classroom. All these have stayed with me as precious, faded memories.’*

Students appreciated both my performance techniques and my genuine passion for music, as they sensed my love of it. Giroux (2024a) argued that teachers are cultural workers, bringing their whole selves (cultural identities, personal histories and their passion) together. In this sense, the personal/professional distinction is a binary that limits pedagogical possibilities. Haraway’s (1988) notion of situated knowledge adds another dimension as my knowledge always comes from somewhere. This includes my background as a then low-income, now middle-class Korean, my classical piano training, the migrant wound I carry and my Catholic and state school teaching experiences. These positions may limit me; at the same time, they may enable me to open up possibilities (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012).

As revealed in the Kia Ora moment, my Korean/Australian positioning is both/and: what limited me was my lack of knowledge and a misunderstanding of Māori culture, while what served as a resource was my experience of marginalisation, which enabled me to understand the experiences of students as migrants. In light of this, my knowledge was partial. However, this partiality is not a weakness, because “all knowledge is partial, never whole, simply there,

and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another” (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). The key is to acknowledge this partiality and speak responsibly from it (Lang, 2011).

Through the Kia Ora and ‘Hallelujah’ moments, I came to see my students as fellow lifelong learners (Freire, 2005). In this sense, the teacher/student binary was challenged. However, this does not negate the power dynamics in the classroom. I differ from my students in institutional authority (e.g., the power to grade students’ work), musical expertise (e.g., years of music training), and in adult/child and teacher/student roles; real power dynamics still exist.

I had more Western classical music and musical literacy expertise, but not necessarily superior knowledge, because students had their own cultural musical knowledge that I did not have. In other words, they had different knowledge, not unequal or inferior knowledge. This is what Freire (2005) meant by “teacher-student with students-teachers” (p. 80), recognising mutual incompleteness and learning together.

Understanding how I am reconfigured differently at different moments, and how I am contradictory and partial, is necessary for conscientisation. When I understand that I am not a stable, fixed identity or entity but always becoming, I also gain the possibility of becoming differently.

The next section explores conscientisation (Freire, 2005), the critical awareness gained through cracks (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987), and the praxis based on that awareness (such as how I began to see the textbook policy differently, saw myself through the Kia Ora moment, and enacted the ‘Hallelujah’ moment as praxis).

Conscientisation as Material-Discursive-Affective Becoming

Conscientisation refers to “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2005, p. 35). It does not stop “at the level of the mere subjective perception of a situation but, through action, prepares [people] for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanisation” (Freire, 2005, p. 119). Thus, it is an ontological, epistemological, and ethical process (Kress & Lake, 2018; Roberts,

1998). Freire also argued that developing a critical consciousness involves seeking to know oneself, others and the world. Knowing is not “an abstract, purely cognitive process, separated from the rest of the world, but is an intensely practical process, intertwined with the messy realities of everyday life” (Roberts, 2007, p. 513). In other words, knowing is “something with which one engages with one’s whole being—with feeling, willing and action, as well as with reason” (Roberts, 2007, p. 513).

In this context, when reading my narratives with Freire’s (2005) notion of conscientisation, alongside Apple (2019), Giroux (2020), Haraway (1988, 1991a) and Barad (2007), this process reveals a multidimensional shift. It is simultaneously understanding structural inequalities (discursive elements) (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020), feeling shame and anxiety (affective elements) (Ahmed, 2014a), perceiving the music textbooks and learning spaces politically (material elements) (Apple (2019), becoming from the centre of authority to being a co-learner and lifelong learner (relational elements) (Apple, 2019; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020; Haraway, 2016), shifting classroom atmospheres amid sighs and tensions (affective element) (Ahmed, 2014a), and moving from the banking concept to problem-posing (music) education (discursive elements) (Freire, 2005). These dimensions are inseparable and are entangled through an intra-action (Barad, 2003). For example, affective transformation, from frustration and sighs to joy and enthusiasm, cannot occur without cognitive awareness. Pedagogical shifts cannot take place without material conditions, and relational shifts cannot occur without embodied practice. Intra-action exemplifies that conscientisation is not a mere cognitive shift of an individual (Kress & Lake, 2018) but a reconfiguring of a material-discursive-affective entanglement.

Textbook Moment

Despite my weekly textbook-check routine, many students still did not bring them to class. This led to accumulated frustration between the students and me. During my doctoral studies, I used Pinar’s (1994) *carrere* to write, read and analyse/interpret these moments, which led to critical reflection (Smith, 2013). Through all of this, a gradual awareness emerged. In this sense, conscientisation was not a sudden epiphany but was a painful, embodied

awareness that unfolded through multiple dimensions (Kress & Lake, 2018).

First, I recognised the power dynamics in the classroom; I was at the centre of authority (or an internalised oppressor) (Freire, 2005). The internalised oppressor within me told me that '*students must bring textbooks to learn properly; parents and guardians who do not purchase textbooks and materials must maintain standards for their children to learn the content and topic prescribed in the curriculum framework*'. However, recognising that these were not only my own beliefs but also the rationale for internalised hegemony was a moment of conscientisation. In Korea, these logics and norms worked well in the piano schools and university entrance auditions. My students from working-class backgrounds at Cherry Blossom State School were marginalised and even excluded by these logics/norms in my classroom. Freire (2005) argued that this 'discovery'—that is, when "the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organised struggle for their liberation, that they begin to believe in themselves" (p. 65)—cannot be solely intellectual because it needs an action, a critical intervention.

Drawing on Freire's (2005) argument, I felt that understanding this logic/norm was insufficient. Building on this realisation, I imagined what I could have done instead (Haraway, 2016), that I would need to:

- ✚ stop checking textbooks weekly and create alternative approaches, such as projecting or sharing the textbook on a whiteboard with every student;
- ✚ shift from 'students must bring materials' to 'how can I teach without assuming material access?'; and
- ✚ act accordingly.

My understanding of how cultural capital (Apple, 2019) became viscerally embodied in the conscientisation moments of my textbook-checking routine. Textbooks were 'necessary materials'; afterwards, 'textbooks are priced out of reach for some families', meaning that parents and guardians cannot afford them because of financial constraints, which may have led them to prioritise other academic subjects. Apple (2019) contended that the distribution of cultural capital in schools roughly corresponds to the distribution of economic capital in society. In this light, the textbooks were never neutral. Being aware of unequally distributed cultural capital in schools was not only a matter of my critical

consciousness but also an embodied reality, because my students apologised to me weekly, and my frustration accumulated and showed in my sighs.

Ahmed's (2014a) affect theory enabled me to realise that my sighs were not neutral expressions of disappointment and frustration. I used my emotions to label students' bodies as in/adequate and dis/engaged. Ahmed (2004) also argued that "emotions do things and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space" (p. 119). In light of this, my sighs created a boundary between students with textbooks and those without, fostering a sense of shame and disapproval among the latter. It also oriented the atmosphere of the learning space towards frustration, disappointment and failure, which may have made students who could not afford textbooks feel they did not belong or were unwelcome in the music class. Through this recognition, I felt regret and shame and imagined the tension and anxiety I had caused the students. However, feeling regret and shame helped me transform simultaneously, so I will no longer enact textbook policy as I did in the past and will find other ways to support students. I will also carefully consider students' circumstances, and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

This new way of imagined teaching resonates with Giroux's (2024b) notion of teachers-as-technicians (who implement the curriculum without questioning) and teachers-as-transformative-intellectuals (who critically question the political dimensions of teaching and curriculum). Reading my teaching experiences through Giroux's (2024b) notions, I realised that when I was asked to focus on theory and musical literacy, I complied by checking the textbooks without critically questioning the request. Freire (2005) explained that "we do things without ever once asking ourselves why we do it. We realise that we do it, but we don't ask the reasons" (p. 139). I did not question why textbooks were necessary, why the emphasis was on theory and musical literacy, or how these textbooks and theory-centred pedagogies may exclude some students. In this context, I was a teacher-technician. However, I was becoming a teacher-as-transformative-intellectual when I started to question:

- 🚩 why music theory should be taught through textbooks;
- 🚩 how students understood theory by using GarageBand; and

- ✚ how my pedagogical choices reproduced or challenged inequality and exclusion.

By asking these questions, I realised that my musical knowledge and performance skills were situated, partial and positioned (Haraway, 1988). My perspective, which was that everyone brought textbooks in Korean middle-class schooling, was not universal but partial. Before the moment of textbook-checking routine conscientisation, I assumed that my experience was the social and educational norm, that students must bring textbooks and relevant materials. I projected my lived experience as a universal expectation. After conscientisation, I recognised that my experience could not be applied to everyone's situation or circumstances because it was only a partial view. Haraway (1991b) noted:

situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of 'objective' knowledge. (p.198)

Reading this textbook moment through Haraway (1988, 1991b), I realised that my students were not objects who failed to meet my internalised expectations. Students were also actors and agents navigating structural limitations of which I was unaware (e.g., unequal distribution of cultural capital and parents and/or guardians prioritising other subjects). Through moments of conscientisation, I came to recognise my students not as inadequate individuals without access to textbooks or other materials but as "situated knowers" (Tan, 2025, p. 6) whose learning emerged through their motivations and relations within material limitations (Haraway, 1988).

Reading the textbook-checking routine conscientisation moment through Barad (2007), I saw that the moment was not merely '*now I understand how I created boundaries between students and labelled them as dis/engaged*' but was a reconfiguring of a material-discursive-affective entanglement through intra-action. In the material dimension, the textbooks were an educational phenomenon; the textbook's price (\$40) structured families' choices and determined who could or could not be a proper student in music class. In other

words, the textbook served as an apparatus, “a specific material reconfiguring” (Barad, 2007, p. 142), which was enacted as the agential cut between students who were welcomed and excluded in the classroom.

In the discursive dimension, the discourses of the *‘engaged, motivated students’*, the *‘responsible, supportive parents and guardians’*, and the *‘professional teacher’* were not just labels. They produced material realities because these discourses elicited my sighs and created boundaries between included and excluded students.

In the affective dimension, my sighs were not only expressions of my frustration and disapproval but also affective and political forces. They shaped the classroom atmosphere and also positioned students as engaged and included or disengaged and excluded. Affect circulated through students’ bodies and shaped what was accepted (possible) and what was not (impossible) in the classroom. These three dimensions align with Barad’s (2007) explanation that human and non-human elements (or entities) are not isolatable but co-constitute one another through ongoing material-discursive-affective entanglement.

Conscientisation as critical consciousness alone is insufficient. It is only partially complete without recognising oppression, and how transformative change cannot take place unless I feel how it circulates through my body and my students’ bodies, and shapes our relationships and power dynamics in the classroom.

Concurrently, affective orientation alone (Ahmed, 2006; 2014) is insufficient for transformation. Even if I feel discomfort and frustration, without being critically aware of the material-discursive conditions (Barad, 2007), those emotions cannot translate into action and reflection (praxis). Without recognising the material-discursive conditions of the textbook’s price and its impact on working-class families’ lives, affect remains as discomfort, shame and frustration. However, material elements alone cannot lead to transformation. Even if I understand the hidden (cultural and political) meaning of the textbook price, change and transformation do not take place without a relational shift, to see students as empowering, situated knowers (Haraway, 1988; Tan, 2025). As Giroux (1985, 2024a) argued, unless the teacher repositions themselves from a technician to a transformative intellectual, material-discursive-affective

awareness remains knowledge that does not lead to action-reflection (praxis). Further, even embodied change or transformation reproduces oppression if partiality is not acknowledged. For example, in line with Haraway's (1988) work, my Korean middle-class perspective and the ways I instructed students in the music classroom came from my unique positionality (Tilley-Lubbs, 2018). If I claim change or transformation without recognising this positionality, I unconsciously perpetuate other forms of exclusion, because my conscientisation is always partial and situated (Haraway, 1988).

Therefore, conscientisation is not a process by which individual teachers *teach better*. It is a much more complex and entangled process (Kress & Lake, 2018). In this sense, I argue that conscientisation is a reconfiguring of the material-discursive-affective entanglement; it can be an ongoing process in which textbooks are materialised and produced differently, discourses are circulated differently, affects flow and circulate differently, teacher identities/subjectivities are positioned differently, and pedagogical approaches are enacted differently. All of these elements need to be entangled together.

Kia Ora Moment

In Etude 5, I wrote: *'I walked away frowning, feeling somewhat confused. At the hotel, I suddenly realised: What had I done? The boys probably wanted to say hi to me in their language. I misinterpreted their intentions and treated them rudely ... That experience reminded me of how I treated my students ... I focused only on what others had done to me and what had hurt me, but I failed to see what kind of teacher I was to my students'*.

This moment was painful to write and read. I saw myself, both at the centre of authority and on the periphery (as a member of a cultural minority). This recognition was visceral. Drawing on this recognition, I delve into a cultural-relational awakening in this section.

According to Freire (2005), conscientisation goes beyond recognising oppressive structures and involves a process in which the subject critically reflects on themselves within those structures. This requires an ability to recognise not only that I am marginalised but also that I am capable of internalising or reproducing oppressive relations.

I was a *stranger* (Ahmed, 2014b) in New Zealand (see Etude 5). I was

unfamiliar with the Māori language and culture. In response to students mimicking the way I spoke in the music classroom, I developed a defensive mechanism (or affect) that carried over into my interaction with the Māori boys. I misinterpreted their welcome gesture as unwelcome and responded icily. I treated the Māori boys exactly the way I feared my students would treat me (ignorance). Moreover, I treated my students and their parents and/or guardians similarly, misinterpreting their communication styles as disrespectful and failing to understand their worldviews.

Giroux (2024b) emphasised that teaching is cultural work because it requires understanding students' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and communication styles. After experiencing the Kia Ora conscientisation moment, I became someone different. I had to (re)start by getting to know and understand my students and their worlds. I had to look more closely at their sociocultural and religious backgrounds and at how they behaved/acted in my classroom and, when possible, in other teachers' classrooms. Moreover, just as I demanded my own norms (e.g., students must bring textbooks, students must learn to read and write music notation), I needed to learn theirs. Here, Giroux (1991) argued that teachers need to become *border-crossers* to “challenge traditional educational goals as it seeks to create an environment where marginalised groups can express their opinions and challenge the dominance of the prevailing culture” (Seyyedi, 2025, p. 15). I demanded that students cross into my Korean, middle-class norms by expecting them to sit quietly, focus on acquiring musical literacy, respect me as their teacher, and bring textbooks. This demand implied that music was an important subject and that I was the authority figure, whose instructions students must follow. However, I did not think about crossing into their worlds, that talking to classmates while completing the worksheets might be their norm and that their seemingly disrespectful behaviour might be a cultural misreading on my part. The Kia Ora moment made me realise that I needed to first cross into my students' worlds, to learn about them.

In a similar vein, I did not see students for who they were; I saw them through my affective histories, my expectations as an authority figure and my migrant wounds. Ahmed (2004) articulated that emotions “move sideways as well as backwards (repression always leaves its trace in the present)—hence,

‘what sticks/attaches’ is also bound up with the ‘absent presence’ of historicity” (p. 120). In other words, emotions and affect connect the past and the present. My migrant wounds, the Māori boys’ greetings and my reactions (past); the moment of conscientisation (present); and my efforts to support my future students (imagined future) were not separated but were co-constituted through entanglement (Barad, 2007). My affective histories were not only in the past; they were with me in the New Zealand supermarket, intra-actively entangled, haunted (Derrida, 2012). In this sense, affective histories are not merely about feelings but are about material-discursive forces. My reaction (i.e., frowning and walking away) was discursively shaped by my thoughts that *‘adolescent learners were not treating me with respect, and I did not belong in the state school classroom’*.

Conscientisation through the Kia Ora moment required thinking with Freire (2005), Apple (2019), Giroux (2020), Ahmed (2014a), Haraway (1991a) and Barad (2007). Reading this moment alongside Freire (2005), I viewed myself as the centre of authority in the music classroom. I was not just a member of a cultural minority and marginalised in the Australian education system, but I was also actively passing on norms that I had internalised to my students at Cherry Blossom State School.

Thinking with Giroux (2020, 2024a, 2024b), I became aware that I shifted and transformed from a teacher-technician to a border-crosser as I recognised that my role as a teacher was not just to transmit legitimate musical knowledge but to learn about the worlds of my students and also invite them to see my world; they are not empty vessels but situated knowers (Tan, 2025).

Through Ahmed (2000, 2004, 2014a), I came to understand that my affective histories and migrant wounds shaped my reactions towards educational events. My frowns and sighs were not only responses to students not bringing textbooks, but also the result of years of music training I had internalised in Korea.

Thinking with Haraway (1988, 1991a), I was able to acknowledge my partial perspective on my musical knowledge. As a person from the Korean middle class, my perspective was not a universal standard but a particular view I held. Students’ greetings, their different languages and their ways of being and knowing were also important situated (and partial) knowledges and norms.

Recognising my partiality legitimised students' social, cultural and musical knowledge.

Through Barad (2007), I recognised that my affective histories and migrant wounds were not merely past experiences. My past was not only in my memory but also actively shaping and working in the present moment (Pinar, 1994). Past, present and future are inseparable and are entangled through intra-action. For example, my piano training experiences in Korea are, and will be, material-discursive-affective entanglements that produce phenomena in the music classroom.

This conscientisation was not only a recognition that I understand that cultural differences exist in the music classroom. It was a painful recognition, a visceral discomfort, facing my experiences. It was relational and a shift from judging students as an expert music teacher to becoming a lifelong learner alongside my students, getting to know their worlds. It was embodied, and it was a shift in how I responded to educational events physically and emotionally. It was about smiling rather than frowning, being curious rather than defensive, and being open rather than rigid and quiet. It was a material-discursive-affective entanglement. It was about recognising affective histories and migrant wounds not as my personal feelings/emotions, but as collective social and political forces (Ahmed, 2014a).

Through this inquiry, I was able to interrogate how my musical expectations and cultural positionality, shaped by Western classical music education, intersected with the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students I taught and how I understood and responded to their educational contexts. Particularly, my perspective, which prioritised the ability to read and write music notation and acquiring advanced performance techniques through performing Western classical pieces in music education, was neither naturally accepted by all secondary school students nor necessarily regarded by them as knowledge they needed to learn. I came to recognise that this perspective had positioned particular forms of musical knowledge and ways of learning at the centre, despite students bringing diverse musical, cultural, and educational experiences to the classroom. At the same time, my in-between positionality situated in the cultural and music education experiences of Korea and Australia prompted me to question the assumptions about music teaching and learning that I had taken

for granted and enabled me to view differently how students' diverse musical experiences and knowledge are valued or marginalised in the classroom.

Chapter 7. Towards an Inconclusion: Synthetic Moments

In this chapter, I reflect with the synthetic step of currere (Pinar, 1994) on who I have become and how my narratives and multiple theories are entangled to open new possibilities (Barad, 2007). This final chapter suggests teacher-becoming as an ongoing, precarious, always “in-process and reconstituted anew” (Gannon, 2022, p. 43) and the tentative, unfinished quality of this work.

Teacher-Becoming

What am I doing now? I am not solely reporting my past, but also engaging in a material-discursive-affective entanglement, moving to reproducing my teaching and learning experiences in a specific way and reconfiguring future possibilities (Barad, 2007). In other words, I re-tell my experiences of learning and teaching music differently, thinking and reading my narrative moments with multiple theories, (re)relate myself as a teacher, educator, and researcher to my students and their parents, power dynamics, and what emotions/affect do in the classroom. I shift how I understand teaching music, how I might act and feel in the future, and what counts as good teaching, learning and musical knowledge. Through writing this thesis, I have reconfigured the conditions of what becomes possible for me as a teacher/educator/researcher (and the readers, potentially), actively reshaping what can be felt, thought, and done. As I began to understand learning emerging relationally, I was “undoing” (Barad, 2024, p. 199) the banking model of education I had internalised and used in the classroom in the past. This undoing opens possibilities: emergent teaching and learning, relation-centred teaching and learning (Rendoñ, 2009), and co-produced and co-constituted (musical) knowledge (Pinar, 2023).

Through writing, I co-constitute an educational phenomenon, and this phenomenon co-constitutes me as a teacher and researcher. This is an ongoing becoming process through intra-action (Barad, 2007), includes theoretical frameworks, my narratives, past teaching and learning experiences, future readers (of this thesis), and the affects of the writing and reading moments (that

were painful), all coming together to create something new (St. Pierre, 2021a). All of these things are entangled together, opening up new possibilities (Barad, 2007). This writing is more than a description of my teaching and learning experiences or my thoughts about them.

In the discussion chapter, I explored various reconfigurings of myself as a music teacher (Barad, 2007):

- ✚ embodying and reproducing the banking model of education; and
- ✚ beginning to challenge binaries/boundaries and experiencing conscientisation.

However, what I explored above was produced through my thesis writing. The narratives do not transparently show what ‘was (or what happened)’. Rather, they were co-constructed in *currere*, which consists of regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic steps through complex teaching and learning experiences and were re-constructed through an intra-active entanglement with multiple theories (Barad, 2007).

I am not merely telling my stories in this thesis; I am critiquing pedagogical approaches and cultural practices in secondary music education, such as:

- ✚ the banking model of education
- ✚ the Eurocentric music curriculum
- ✚ binary thinking (e.g., theory/practice, Western classical/popular music, reading and writing music notation/copying recordings by ear, pen-and-paper or textbook methods for learning/utilising GarageBand)
- ✚ teachers-as-technicians/teachers-as-transformative-intellectuals

Ellis and Bochner (2000) explained that autoethnography explores “the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). However, what I offer is not only an abstract, philosophical critique but also an embodied, affective, material, discursive critique (Barad, 2007).

What does this writing do? It embraces vulnerability that can be “scary, but also can be the source of growth and understanding” (Ellis & Bochner,

2000, p. 752). I expressed my vulnerability by sharing my teacher-failing moments (e.g., avoiding the introduction of gospel music as outlined in Etude 4, my responses to the Māori boys, and misunderstandings of my students' behaviours in the music classroom, as outlined in Etude 5). These moments reveal how the educational system works, not as a result of individual teachers' (good or bad) pedagogical choices, but as a product of structural, material-discursive-affective reconfigurings (Barad, 2007). In addition, through this writing, I do not transmit the findings or results to the readers of this thesis. I invite them to enter my world and "to use what the readers learn to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 280).

In this inquiry, the process of plugging my narratives into theories has transformed me as a teacher, educator, and researcher. I did not apply Freire's (2005) notion of the banking model of education and conscientisation to explain my teaching and learning experience. Rather, I read Freire (2005) through Barad (2007) in order to understand the banking model not simply as 'transmitting musical knowledge to my students', but as a specific material-discursive-affective entanglement. I read Haraway (1988, 1991b, 2016) through Ahmed (2006, 2014a) to understand binaries/boundaries in the music classroom, and schools not only as abstract, logical structures but also as affect, positioning and orienting my body and my students' bodies, and posing im/possibilities. Through Freire (2005) and Barad (2007), praxis is not viewed as a linear process of reflection and action (or vice versa), but as becoming through the intra-action of the two. I have come to understand that binaries/boundaries are not pre-existing, nor natural, neutral or inevitable, but enacted through agential cuts—that is, a specific reconfiguration of apparatus enacts particular cuts to determine what is possible or impossible (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023)—and specific material-discursive assemblages. I have come to understand that I have a responsibility to critically examine which binaries/boundaries are being enacted, analyse the agential cuts and apparatus that produce them, and reconfigure future possibilities. I am becoming a music teacher and educator who attempts to create a learning space where every student and teacher feels seen, heard, and valued (Rendoñ, 2009).

I am recognising that I, as a teacher-researcher (Stenhouse, 1975), am becoming a teacher who requires a fluid subjectivity (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987;

Gannon, 2022; Vicars, 2016), a reconfiguring of specific moments (Barad, 2007). The me of the 'Hallelujah' moment is different from the me who checked students' textbooks every week, or from the me who is writing this sentence at this very moment. Pedagogy is not an approach that teachers choose; it is a material-discursive-affective entanglement through an intra-action (Barad, 2007). Teachers do not choose a pedagogical approach to teach students; rather, teachers, students, the classroom space, desks, chairs, musical instruments, the classroom temperature, the weather, and the school culture are entangled and intertwined to influence the implementation of a specific pedagogy on a specific day and at a specific time.

What This Inquiry Opens

This inquiry contributes to music education research by providing a situated account of how musical knowledge, curriculum, pedagogical approaches and teacher-becoming are negotiated through teachers' cultural, educational, and embodied histories.

This inquiry also contributes to autoethnographic scholarship through its methodological approach to autobiographical experience. A distinctive feature of the methodology is the bringing together of Pinar's (1994) *carrere* and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011) within this autoethnographic inquiry. Rather than treating my personal narratives as transparent representations of a past that can be analysed/interpreted, I engaged with them through *carrere* and thinking with theory as part of an ongoing process of reconfiguring. *Carrere* (Pinar, 1994) enabled me to move recursively across past, present and future, while thinking with multiple theories enabled me to read these experiences differently to produce new insights. Autoethnographic writing became not only a means of representing lived experience but also a site through which the narratives, theories, and I, as a teacher-researcher (Stenhouse, 1975), were continually reconfigured. This approach offers a way of understanding autoethnographic inquiry as a process of becoming, through which new possibilities for thinking, feeling, and practising as a music teacher, educator, and researcher can emerge.

Through the lens of Apple's (2019) notion of selective tradition and legitimate knowledge, alongside Ahmed's (2004, 2014a) affect theory, this

inquiry contributes to a different understanding of why Western classical music becomes 'legitimate musical knowledge' in the context of secondary (and university) music education. Furthermore, this inquiry shows that my teaching and learning experiences as a transnational migrant music teacher (a Korean-Australian teacher, being situated within the in-between of two cultures, two languages, two classrooms, and two musics) are not only personal stories, but they also reveal how my in-between positioning makes curriculum negotiation possible differently (Barad, 2007). This inquiry also argues that pedagogy is not something chosen by the teacher alone, but it is a phenomenon that emerges through entanglement with humans and non-humans (e.g., classroom space, textbooks, instruments, students, teachers, school culture) (Barad, 2007). This provides a new perspective for discussions of pedagogy in initial teacher education. Lastly, this inquiry suggests the importance of teacher-becoming over teacher-making; in other words, emphasising the teaching/learning journey (or seeing the curriculum as the running of the course of study). Pinar (2023) urges teachers and students to focus on their lived experience of curriculum, acquiring teaching methods and guidelines to be 'competent, proper' teachers. Since teachers, students, theories, performances, and material conditions are always intertwined, teacher-becoming is never complete (Vicars, 2016), and that is the reason why this inquiry is heading towards an inconclusion.

This inquiry is limited by its reliance on a retrospective autoethnographic account of my own past teaching/learning experiences. Memories of past experiences can be selective, and my current position and perspective may have influenced how I recall and analyse/interpret them (Trinh et al., 2022). Moreover, because this inquiry explores the experiences situated within specific sociocultural and educational contexts of a single music teacher, the analysis and interpretations produced here cannot be generalised to other teachers or educational contexts. However, generalisation is not the purpose of this inquiry. Rather, through an in-depth exploration of my lived experience, this inquiry aimed to give other teachers, teacher educators, and researchers the opportunity to reflect on and question their own experiences and educational practices.

Staying With the Trouble

What pedagogical futures have become possible through this inquiry (Haraway, 2016)? First, a possible answer is music education without binaries/boundaries (e.g., classical/popular music, formal/informal teaching practice, theory/performance, teacher/student). If these binaries/boundaries are not natural and neutral (Apple, 2019), then we can imagine a pedagogy that embraces multiplicity. If gospel, jazz, Western classical, global and popular music can be both/and/neither (like Haraway's (1991b) notion of cyborg), then so can all music genres. Hip-hop, K-pop, OSTs, video game music, and even children's songs and students' humming are not mere tools to attract students' attention in the music classroom and engage them in music education, but rather legitimate musical knowledge (alongside Western classical music).

Second, we can view pedagogy as a material-discursive-affective entanglement (Barad, 2007; Ringrose et al., 2020). If pedagogy is not simply a teaching approach but a material-discursive-affective entanglement in which humans and non-humans are intertwined to produce specific pedagogy in a specific moment, then teachers can teach music differently. Comfortable chairs, ample time to learn, accessible musical instruments, textbooks, and performance spaces; all of these are not just nice-to-haves, but are active participants that are intertwined and reconfigure potential pedagogy (Haraway, 2016). In other words, pedagogy is not chosen by teachers; it can emerge through reconfiguring and intra-active entanglement (Barad, 2024).

Lastly, we can (re)imagine initial teacher education if we view teachers and students as not fixed, stable identities who are "rational, unified, singular, simple, and consciously self-chosen" (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 9), but fluid subjectivities, a postmodern understanding of the individual as "socially constructed, complicated, fragmented, and contradictory" (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 10). Then, we can also view teachers as not aiming to become proper, competent teachers who implement 'the most effective' pedagogies, but continuously becoming, navigating the entanglements of material-discursive-affective elements in their classrooms. In this sense, initial teacher education can be understood as reconfigurings of educational moments (Barad, 2007).

Following Haraway (2016), I acknowledge that binary tensions persist

and remain unresolved. Complex musical concepts, topics, and performance techniques in Western classical music are still taught in secondary music classrooms with limited resources and under overcrowded timetables. While ukuleles, keyboards, and the GarageBand software program are available to Cherry Blossom State School students, they may need to share these when learning music (unlike the students at Banksia and Eucalyptus Catholic Schools). Such disparities are produced by the education system within which teachers work. Standardised testing (such as NAPLAN and PISA), along with standardised curriculum, assessments and measurements, may exclude the multiplicities and possibilities (Apple, 2019) that material-discursive-affective pedagogy seeks to open up. As a teacher, I still need to evaluate and demonstrate that students are meeting curriculum outcomes. These tensions cannot be resolved fully by an individual teacher alone.

Invitations to Readers

Barad (2007) noted that “the world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting” (p. x). This inquiry is no different, as I am still in a continuous process as a teacher and educator and as a researcher. Even after experiencing the ‘Hallelujah’ moment, I still struggle, learn, slip and crack, and strive to become “someone else that I was not at the beginning” (Foucault, 1988, p. 9). This is conscientisation as an ongoing process of becoming, not a single transformation (Freire, 2005). This is also an invitation for us to stay with the trouble together (Haraway, 2016), to continue becoming. Music education, therefore, can be a site of struggle and becoming. I do not want readers to simply comprehend what I presented in the discussion chapter on a cognitive level. I hope readers can feel and reconsider in order to become different beings. In addition, this inquiry is not an end, but in the middle of thinking, practising, and becoming differently.

This inquiry has several implications for music teachers. First, teachers need to continuously question which music and musical knowledge are positioned as legitimate knowledge during curriculum implementation, and what possibilities and limitations these choices create for student engagement in music education. Second, rather than understanding student engagement and

participation merely as the choice of specific pedagogical approaches teachers implement, it is necessary to consider how material-discursive-affective elements (e.g., students, teachers, musical instruments, classroom space, time, resources, and school culture) intertwine to create specific teaching and learning possibilities. Lastly, early-career music teachers can understand their practice as a process of teacher-becoming, which involves continuously questioning and reconfiguring their curriculum and pedagogical choices, as well as the assumptions that shape those choices, rather than setting the goal of becoming competent teachers who implement the 'correct' or 'most effective' pedagogical approaches. For this reason, I would like to ask readers a few questions for self-reflection:

- ✚ To music teachers: What binaries/boundaries exist, and what is legitimate musical knowledge in your classroom? What material-discursive-affective elements are entangled when you teach?
- ✚ To teacher educators: Is it possible to shift teacher education from training pre-service teachers to become *proper, competent teachers* to *supporting teacher-becoming*?
- ✚ To policy-makers: What if we recognised that material conditions (e.g., class size, resource availability and accessibility, time allowance) are not solely logistics, but active agents, and participants shaping teacher pedagogy?

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