Implications of a culturally rich and linguistically diverse musical life for music teaching and learning

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Abstract

I am a Chinese-Australian musician-educator of over three decades. In this autoethnography, I act as an agent of change by presenting my life as a social project. This assists understanding of a larger relational, communal and political world that moves us to critical engagement, social action and change. Evolutionary psychology asserts that language has evolved from the use of music. Empirical research maintains that children who start learning music early become better learners of languages. Music psychologists argue that music education is crucial in identity construction. Being a multi-lingual, multi-instrumental, and multi-occupational individual, I consider myself primarily a musician. My various identities in music as pianist-accompanist, singer, choral conductor, composer, and dance instructor informed and shaped my other identities as psychotherapist, interpreter-translator, author, teacher and academic researcher. The findings of this study suggest that formal/informal musical engagement fosters executive brain functions that determine my learning outcomes. My research contributes to the national debate about the benefits of music in education. It addresses a research gap identified about the effect of musical engagement on identity formation, and learning in other curriculum areas. The findings can assist music advocacy and provide insight to the preparation of future educators for multicultural Australia.

Key words: autoethnography, social change, Confucianism, identity formation, music and music education, formal and informal learning.

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Introduction

An analysis of 558 research studies in the Bibliography of Australian Music Education Research (BAMER) database for the period from 1936 to 2012 found several research gaps concerning music education advocacy in Australia (Stevens & Stefanakis, 2014). This paper aims to address "the effect of music engagement on identity formation and the influence of music on learning in other curriculum areas" identified by Stevens and Stefanakis (p. 6). The transferable skills acquired through music education such as rational thinking, creativity, language competency and social skills are the focus of this paper. This autoethnographic study is framed within my personal script as a culturally rich and linguistically diverse musician-educator.

In a continual effort to advocate for the benefits of music education, The Music Trust (TMT) (2014) summarised music education research outcomes. One body of research focuses on the effect of music education on brain development. Neuroscientists claim that playing music is the brain's equivalent of a full-body workout, musicians use more parts of their brain simultaneously to complete tasks, and the

musician's brain is used as a model for the study of neuroplasticity that is the adaptive capability of the central nervous system. Empirical research findings confirmed that music making integrates multiple brain systems; it primes the brain for learning and causes development that benefits the whole person (Wilson, Abbott, Lusher, Gentle & Jackson, 2011; Merritt & Wilson, 2011; Wilson, 2013). Other studies investigated the extrinsic (musical) and instrumental (other than musical) benefits of music education, and found that music fosters language learning, reading and improves memory (Dunbar, 2003 & 2010; Henriksson-Macaulay, 2014). Successful studies of contemporary musicians report that certain types of brain development need to be stimulated by music by age seven in order for such effects to be retained for life.

TMT also used the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings of literacy, numeracy and science scores of 15 year-olds around the world, to argue that music education might have been the key to general school success among the children in the highest ranked countries/cities: Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Korea, Macau, Japan, Switzerland (with Australia ranked 19th in 2012) because these countries/cities provided better musical training for primary school teachers. In addition, TMT explored how music was taught in the five highest scoring countries/cities including Shanghai, Singapore, Finland, Hong Kong and Korea. In the 2009 results, it showed that these countries/cities devoted more time to classroom music than the Australian school system. It suggests that there may be a causal link between music education and school success among children in the named countries at the policy (not practice) level. Very few research studies had been conducted (Kallio, 2009 on Finland; Letts, 2012 on Hong Kong) and no in-depth or longitudinal studies have been undertaken. In an effort to avoid over generalisations of such preliminary research findings, Stevens and Stefanakis (2014) pointed out although the PISA scores are high in both Hong Kong and Finland, the different methods of delivering music education, and the underlying philosophies of these targeted places have not been thoroughly investigated. Therefore, drawing any kind of conclusions between school learning outcomes and the provision of music education in Hong Kong and Finland seems premature.

The underlying philosophies and methods of delivery in diverse countries are the undercurrent to the current discussion. It is observed that the first seven top ranked countries for the 2012 PISA scores are North Asian countries/cities influenced by Confucianism: Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Korea, Macau and Japan are collectively known as Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) countries/cities. In discussing the aims and objectives for world music education in the new millennium, Hargreaves, Marshall and North (2003) pointed out there were clear East-West differences. The primary aim of art educators from Japan, China, Korea, who have a foundation in Confucian philosophy is to develop the character of the pupils, and to lay foundations for a virtuosic and joyful life. Such understandings place much greater emphasis on the moral and spiritual role of the arts than their Western counterparts.

As a culture bearer of the CHC who spent her first fifteen years immersed in Chinese culture in the former Portuguese colony Macau, I examine the influence of the fusion of Eastern and Western culture on the formation of my identities. I am a practising Christian but this does not readily contradict with my cultural roots since Confucianism is not a religious belief (Li, 2003a). Confucianism was founded by Confucius; it has been the central ideology of Chinese culture for more than 2500 years. Confucius was a philosopher, teacher, artist and musician; and Confucianism is considered by Confucian scholars as a philosophy rather than a religion (Ames & Rosemont, 1999; de Bary, 1991; Li, 2003a). In this article I will explore how formal and informal music education was embedded in

my sociocultural context and its values shaping my multiple occupational identities across my lifespan. The benefits of music engagement on my learning in other disciplines including behavioural science and languages will also be explored. This research is a personal in-depth narrative account, an autoethnographic research journey using the lenses of a Chinese-Australian, with dual understandings of East-West influences.

Theoretical basis of my research

I am a musician, composer, psychotherapist, author, translator-interpreter, studio/school teacher, and academic researcher. My doctoral research investigates the influence of the fusion of Confucianism and Western psychological and religious culture on family dynamics, learning and identity formation of Chinese musicians. This topic covers a broad domain including philosophy, psychology, languages, and cultural studies. The complexities of my multi-dimensional research paradigm reflect the person I have evolved to become, and I am still evolving. A discussion of the influence of Confucianism on my identity formation has already been published (Fung, 2014). Confucius argued that the ultimate goal for every individual is to have a life-long striving to be the most genuine, sincere and virtuous human being through moral cultivation of the self, and immersion in the arts can assist such development (Ames & Rosemont, 1999). It can be said that self-perfection is the overarching thought of Confucian teaching that promotes constant betterment of the self. In Maslow's (1968) model of hierarchy of needs from humanistic psychology, the highest level of human needs is called 'self-actualization'. The Confucian concept of self-perfection is similar to self-actualization in which morality, creativity, spontaneity, and problem solving are the unique features. In psychological terms, to be self-actualized is to become the person one can be, by fully utilizing all one's potentials. In this current music advocacy paper, Confucianism is briefly mentioned to provide the research context, but the musical and linguistic aspects related to my holistic development are the main focus.

Maslow (1968) asserted that music, music education and musical experience had been his personal psychoanalysis: discovering his own identity, his own self. Hargreaves, Miell and McDonald (2002) stated that the concept of self-identity is important because it enables us to understand an individual's musical development from the inside whilst clearly locating identity as an emergent feature of our social world. They identified two types of identities: identities in music (IIM) and music in identities (MII). IIM deals with those aspects of musical identities that are socially defined within given cultural roles and musical categories, whereas MII focuses on how we use music as a means to develop other individual identities. I consider myself primarily as a musician (IIM); but music has also been used as the means for me to develop my other identities as author, teacher, interpreter, researcher, psychotherapist (MII). All of these require a high degree of literacy skills and competency in spoken language/s.

Costa-Giomi (2004) found that three years of piano instruction had positive effects on children participants' self-esteem and school music results. Henriksson-Macaulay (2014) argued that when children start studying music before the age of seven, they develop bigger vocabularies, a better sense of grammar, and a higher verbal IQ. These advantages benefit both the development of their mother tongue and the learning of foreign languages. Dunbar (2003, 2010 & 2011) indicated that speech as a form of communication has evolved from our original development and use of music. This explains why our music and language neural networks have a significant overlap, and why children who learn music become better at learning the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of any language. Hallam (2010) discussed the power of music on intellectual, social and personal development

of individuals. Such theories help to interpret my own learning journey, in which I believe my primary learning of music served to accelerate my secondary learning in other languages. Hargreaves et al. (2003) proposed a conceptual model with three main types of outcomes in music education. These include personal, musical-artistic and social-cultural outcomes; placing 'self-identity' at the centre of the model. In summary, I regard self-identity as a crucial construct in the understanding of my personal, musical and occupational development.

Methodology

Autoethnography is used in the current study. As a qualitative research method, it is gaining increasing recognition. For example, the special focus for the 2017 International Humanities Conference is the autoethnographic scholar as an agent of change. This method attempts to disrupt the binary of art and science (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Being a performing artist (musician) and a behavioural scientist (psychotherapist), I find this research method most appealing as it ties neatly to my background training. Ellis et al. (2011) defined autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach further challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and "treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act" (p. 273). Autoethnographers use wider lenses to reach diverse audiences that make personal and social change possible (hooks, 1994; Ellis, 1995; Bochner, 1997; Goodall, 2006).

The aim of this study is to explore my identity formation in an effort to demonstrate the importance of music in education. Personal narratives are stories in which the authors view themselves as 'the phenomenon' and write evocative narratives through telling and showing that focused on their personal, academic and research lives (Adams, 2006; Berry, 2007; Poulos, 2008; Tillman, 2009`). Making ideological and discursive trouble is the heart of a critically reflexive approach to research, where a researcher acts as an agent of change who asks questions and imagines changes from inside the politically and personally problematic worlds of everyday life (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Denzin, 2003; Plummer, 2005; Slagle, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Adams & Holman Jones, 2008 & 2011). As an individual, my position is to make noise, create conversations, challenge the existing system, and hope to raise awareness among my fellow educators. I do not intend to present new approaches to music education, but present my lived experiences for researcher-practitioners and policy makers as references. In addition to relying on my memory for writing, I include my journals, photo albums and publications as data to counterbalance my recollections.

Early years – informal learning

I was born in Macau, a Portuguese colony for almost 500 years until its return of sovereignty to Mainland China in 1999 (Hao, 2011). Macau was historically the window to the West because it was the earliest port in China that opened for Western merchants and missionaries. It has a diverse mix of cultural practices and I believe I am the beneficiary of this rich cultural environment. The Portuguese soldier headquarters were located half a block from my house. Every day, I heard the troops marching in a big crowd along my street while chanting some Portuguese words in monotone. As a child, I was excited to see the daily routines of these foreigners who were gigantic and exotic to me, although I secretly wanted to silently hum a better tune to their chanting. If their chanting had been more aurally pleasing, I might have missed the chance to begin to cultivate my critical musical thinking.

In my early childhood, I recall going to live performances of Cantonese opera every Saturday for lunch with my family in a theatre-restaurant

on a ship permanently parked at the Macau seaside; because my paternal grandmother loved to go to Yum Cha while watching a show. We were probably not paying full attention to the performers on stage because we were also busy eating dim sums; but I loved the painted faces, the fascinating costumes of the artists, the occasional martial arts stunts, and the sound of the Erhu (2 stringed Chinese violin) that closely mimics the human voice like the violin. The music was usually conversational involving calls and responses, or interjections between the female and male singer, sometimes echoed by other singers in a chorus or the Chinese instrumental ensemble sitting on the lower side of the stage. I must have absorbed a lot in this repeated observational learning environment. I remember I could always predict how the melodies continued; I hummed along to amuse myself and used my chopsticks to hit my porcelain bowl when the cymbals were played at climactic moments. My ability to write counterpoint may have been cultivated by these Cantonese operas I heard weekly. Green (2008a & 2008b, 2012) asserted that individuals unconsciously or semiconsciously acquire skills and knowledge through watching, listening and imitating others; and informal observations enabled aural learning practices. Other researchers also identified the value of informal musical engagement that resulted in significant learning outcomes of the participants (Paul & Ballantine, 2002; Bartolome & Campbell, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009; Nethsinghe, 2011, 2012).

My innocent mind can reimagine my father being a very funny person who was keen on telling jokes during family gatherings, especially when he became slightly tipsy after sipping a beer. He was always happy when mum cooked us a meal and he would sing his favourite songs while accompanying himself on the family piano. In hindsight, being surrounded by music and comedy at home, I considered learning to play instruments and sing as second nature and enjoyable.

Although television was invented in the 60s they were not prevalent in our homes. I recall having heard a lot of interesting stories in our lounge where our neighbours gathered after dark to listen to mum's retelling of the daily news from reading *The Macau Daily*, sometimes with a bit of harmless gossip about the town's happenings. My mother was a very good story teller. Our mainly affluent neighbourhood was situated at the waist of the *Pine Tree Mountain* but both middle class and working class people coexisted on our street. Our regular house guests included a tradesman, his wife and his illiterate parents who rented my aunt's house next door, as well as an elderly widow who lived alone. No one owned a television, so these evening gatherings were the means for them to reach to the outside world, through my mother's reinventing of the world based on the daily news. As a child observer, I developed a keen interest to reframe the stories my mother told and always came up with outrageous fictional twists. After dinner, I loved to slide down the handrail of the stairs and hide half way down. From my aerial view peeping through the wooden poles of the stairway, I admired mum and desired to be a story teller one day, because her eyes sparkled as she talked with endless variations of body language. In Ellis's words, "as a story teller, I become the story I write and publish today" (2009, p. 14).

My mother taught for almost thirty years as a school music and art teacher. She believed that there is no boundary to learning; learning is like boating against the current – if the boat is not moving forward, it has already been left behind based on the *Confucian Analects* 論語 (475BC, trans. Ames, 2010). Apart from providing a sanctuary of story-telling and plot remaking, our lounge room also gave me fond memories of mum, having her put me on her lap while listening to all sorts of exotic music on the radio including Western Classical music, Portuguese folk songs, Spanish guitar music, Italian and French operas as well as traditional Cantonese operas and Cantonese pop songs. I remember hearing mum

singing hymns at church with her high-pitched soprano voice which gave me goose bumps. I always figured out an Alto line that harmonized with the melody. Such exercises cultivated my aural ability to create choral harmony before my formal music education began. To sum up, my mother nurtured my love for story-telling, aesthetics in visual art, aural ability, appreciation of world music, as well as encouraged me to be the best I could be. I successfully learned to write and publish short stories, and play a number of orchestral instruments besides becoming an accomplished pianist. Research findings confirm that the home environment and the nuclear family members are the primary determinants to school achievement (Garber & Ware, 1972; Shapiro & Bloom, 1977) and musical success of individuals (Brand, 1986; Asmus, 2005).

Formal education, work and inspiring mentors

Confucius maintained that music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without (*Classic of Rites* 禮 記, 500BC, trans. Legge, 1885). Growing up in a musical environment, my love for music started to take shape. Very early on I began to mess around on the family piano. I recall being able to play the instrument properly with two hands while singing along around primary Grade Three. When I reached ten years of age, I took formal lessons from my cousin who lectured in piano in a highly reputable conservatory. He taught me the essential technical skills which gave me a solid foundation to mastering the instrument. In the colonised cities like Hong Kong and Macau in the 60s, the education policies (British and Portuguese) were quite similar, especially among Christian schools run by local Macau/Hong Kong educators in collaboration with Western missionaries/teachers. It had been reported that Hong Kong has strong music programs and traditions in their schools and an infrastructure that is supportive of music education at all levels; therefore, it has little need to advocate for music education (Letts, 2012).

Macau occupied the 6th PISA ranking in literacy, numeracy and science in 2012, and its educational model, philosophy and delivery are similar to those in Hong Kong. Generally speaking, only fully trained subject-specific teachers were employed to teach specialist subjects including musical, visual and physical arts. My primary music teacher was a Chinese-Indonesian pianist-singer who came to Macau for work. He lived in a room at the top floor of the school building, and acted as a warden to the boarding students. I can visualise him playing and singing on the piano vividly during my holiday visit to the school. My fine art teacher was a local painter. In my heart, I can hear her gentle voice and kind words; I can see her quick white-chalk sketches on the blackboard. My physical art (gymnastics) teacher was a professional sports coach besides being a school teacher. I appreciated the valuable specialist instructions I received at primary school. In hindsight, I believe I was extremely fortunate to be taught by many competent teachers at those crucial years. These cultivated my intellectual abilities and artistic senses, leading to the holistic personal development which set a solid foundation for my subsequent learning at high school.

Relating my early formal learning experiences to the Australian primary school scene across the state of Victoria, a serious discrepancy is detected immediately. It has been reported by many Australian research studies and government documents (Stevens, 2003; Stevens & McPherson, 2004; Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005; Parliament of Victoria, 2013a; Stevens & Stefanakis, 2014) that music continues to be in a vulnerable position in Victorian schools, especially in government primary schools where 63% of them do not offer classroom music instruction (TMT, 2014). Among the primary schools that offer classroom music as a subject, not all employ specialist teachers to run music related activities such as choirs, ensembles and productions. The generalist primary teachers are

under-trained to take on specialist jobs.

TMT reported that "Australian primary school classroom teachers receive on average 17 hours of music education in their undergraduate degree, and only 10 hours if qualifying through a postgraduate degree" (2014, p. 2). As a result, many teachers felt less than competent in handling those roles with limited prior training and ongoing professional development which can undermine their sense of professionalism. I tell and retell the story of my lived experiences in the hope that policy makers will respond to my testimony that music education is crucial in facilitating all forms of learning including personal development.

Returning to my teenage years, my piano teacher-cousin became the music teacher at my school when I began Year Seven. Within the music curriculum at junior high, there were a variety of programs including solo and group performances, singing, music theory, history and appreciation. We were also encouraged to listen to simulcasts of live concerts from a music radio station in Macau. Without such continuity of learning from primary education to secondary school, my future study opportunity in music would have been jeopardised. In my first high school year, I began to play the piano for church events and taught children in Sunday school. I also learned to play the Hawaiian guitar, Spanish guitar, mandolin and ukulele at my church string ensemble led by a dedicated specialist music teacher who escaped Communist China at that time. This experience laid the foundation for me to learn the violin at school and the viola da gamba at university when I came to Australia; since all these instruments belong to the same fiddle family. A few weeks before I left Macau for Australia, I won the first prize in a singing competition for singer-song writers. With my early success and achievement in music, I came to believe that I could pursue music as a career option. This also set the pathway for me later to become a composer.

Since I attended Christian primary and secondary schools, I had the opportunity to learn English; but I only started to speak English when I needed it in Australia. At Camberwell High School, I continued to receive high quality classroom music instructions, where my aural ability was extended and I learned to do structural analysis of various forms of musical genres from Medieval to the late twentieth century. I took two music subjects for my High School Certificate (piano solo performance and music craft). Again, if the opportunity of receiving classroom music instructions at high school had been deprived, I would not have been qualified to study music at tertiary level. That same year, I began to learn Mandarin as my third language at Year Twelve and continued with Chinese studies as a minor sequence in my Bachelor of Arts. Empirical research confirmed that my ability to learn a second and third language effectively is pre-determined by my musicality and aural sensitivity; since the software in my brain has been well trained at a very young age to detect and differentiate sounds of various frequencies and qualities (Henriksson-Macaulay, 2014; Dunbar, 2003, 2010 & 2011).

In Melbourne, I met two master teachers – the late Ms May Clifford (OAM) and Ms Jean Starling who were prominent figures in the Western art music scene as teacher-performers and adjudicators. Starling coached my piano performance at my high school years, and Clifford was my piano teacher at the Conservatorium. Starling was a very loving teacher who cared about my transitions as a new migrant. Clifford inspired me to challenge my perceived upper limit. They both fostered my musicality and extended my artistic sensitivity. I was very grateful that I received excellent instructions from these two mentors who taught me about the world beyond what music could offer. Because of their support, my wish to pursue psychology rather than just music was confirmed. During my tertiary years, I began to teach at music schools and earned myself a brand new piano. Eventually, I graduated from the University of Melbourne.

In the following year, I completed a Diploma of Educational Psychology, and began to work as a psychotherapist under supervision. On the same year, I did some music subjects and was offered a scholarship to study a Master of Arts (Music). I ceased the opportunity and detoured from psychology temporarily. I also began to work as an ethnic teacher's aide at a high school and taught Chinese at a local language school. I wrote a master's thesis supervised by Dr Shirley Trembath (consent to be named given). She was a very kind teacher who spoke charmingly to her students. With her excellent instructions, my thesis was extremely well received (HD) and it qualified me for a full research scholarship later.

Between my research masters and commencing my doctoral study in 2013, there was a twenty-three year gap. I had been working in various settings including welfare organizations as a counsellor/advocate. I was funded by the state government to conduct general well-being programs among the ethnic Chinese. At one stage, I also worked as a therapist in a psychiatry department at a local hospital. At the expiration of my funding for such projects, I did a Graduate Diploma of Education to gain a teacher's qualification. During my teacher training, I met an inspirational mentor Associate Professor Jane Southcott (consent given) who later became my doctoral supervisor. She has a great sense of humour and enacts a person-centred approach to teacher education that resonated with my personal philosophy. My mother passed away after a long term illness in 2003. Realising that life needs to be lived to the full, I began to write choral compositions, I signed a ten-year contract with a publisher-distributor who was a retired higher education administrator. So far, I had released twenty-four volumes of choral music into an overseas music market that included more than 200 pieces ranging from full length cantatas and musicals to choral suites. I had also celebrated thirty years of service as a studio music teacher and a long-standing member of the Victorian Music Teachers Association and the Australian Psychological Society. Looking back, I have always been active in choral singing; I had joined many choirs over my lifespan, including the Melbourne Youth Choir, Trinity College Choir, and Melbourne Women's Choir in addition to my own church choir.

Apart from composing/publishing, I also worked as a school teacher for almost a decade, teaching instrumental/classroom music, Chinese, as well as psychology and ESL for a short time. For the first half of my school teaching career, I was the music director assuming a head teacher role. This position extended my leadership skills and performance opportunities in major venues including the Hamer Hall in Melbourne. I had been working with choirs, bands, and keyboard ensembles, as well as coordinating a large team of instrumental music teachers. Of all the various musical roles I have played, I most enjoy composing, performing and conducting my own music through my association with a community choir, and being a conductor member of the Australian National Choral Association. While I was a staff member in the Department of Education, I gained a Language Teachers' Scholarship and completed a master degree in language teaching. In hindsight, I was glad that opportunities to advance my career in music/language teaching continuously knocked on my door. However, without the infrastructure which supported sustainability of my learning (as mentioned), I would not have become who I am now. Likewise, Australian children of the 21st century deserve to receive a sequential music school music education throughout their primary and secondary school years, in order to enjoy the full benefits and potentials of music in education as I did.

Findings and discussions

Believing in the Confucian ideology of constant betterment and self-perfection, I had strived to become the best I could be. I feel so blessed to have received informal learning at my multicultural domestic and church environment.

These experiences fostered my musicality, my sense of humour, my love for people of different cultural backgrounds, as well as my desire to explore the world. I am most thankful that my father took the initiative to move to Australia that provided me with opportunities to engage in formal education and encounters some great teachers. I acknowledge my informal and formal learning; together with the teaching received from my mentors they determined my final learning outcomes. I believe I have utilized my potentials as much as I am consciously aware of although my identity remains fluid. It has been shown that I am a practitioner of my beliefs in attempting 'self-perfection' through life-long learning and feeling 'compelled to excel'. These tenets are solidly founded on a value system rooted in Confucianism, and the Western psychological culture I was exposed to.

In conclusion, I consider music as the core of my self-identity and I consider myself as a professional musician (IIM). I gain many transferable skills from learning music, and I acknowledge that music gives me invaluable resources to develop my secondary identities in other curriculum areas (MII). Having a culturally rich and linguistically diverse musical life, and having taught for more than 30 years as a music educator, I am in an advantageous position to advocate for music in education. Empirical research documents many benefits of music in education (Stevens & McPherson, 2004 & 2014; Asmus, 2005; Willingham, 2009; Kallio, 2009; Letts, 2012a; Merrett & Wilson, 2011; Wilson et al., 2011; Wilson, 2013; Stevens & Stefanakis, 2014; Henriksson-Macaulay, 2014). Personally, music shaped my empathetic personality. I respect all cultures and races. My desire to excel shows in my academic success and occupational achievements. Music fosters the executive functions of my brain that include planning, strategizing, analysing and synthesising information. I believe that thanks to memorising complex musical notations, I acquired a photographic memory. By listening to music, playing instruments and singing, both sides of my brain are activated, leading to the processing of information and improvement of memory. Through musical self-expression, I understand my emotions. This builds self-esteem, empathy and social skills, benefiting my career in counselling, teaching, and my current role as a research-teaching associate at the faculty. Music develops my left brain involving language and reasoning, and cultivates higher verbal IQ. These benefited my work in language teaching, interpreting/translating, research and authorship.

My story demonstrates that total immersion in informal/formal musical engagement from an early age is a powerful factor for later learning including music, behavioural science, and languages. These are congruent with numerous research findings that successful professional musicians began music lessons at a young age mostly around three or four, and children who learn music become better at learning languages (Dunbar, 2003, 2010 & 2011; Henriksson-Macaulay, 2014). Also, brain development needs to be stimulated by music education by age seven in order for prior learning to be retained for the rest of life (Wilson et al., 2011, Merritt & Wilson, 2011; Wilson, 2013). Furthermore, in addition to having private music teachers to develop my performance skills, I received very high quality classroom music instructions continuously without interruption from primary to senior high school; I believe this was crucial for my musical success.

Our school system should be held accountable for the provision of an infrastructure that leads to sustainability of prior learning being integrated into new learning. Stirring up a storm or 'making ideological trouble' is the responsibility of any musician who has reaped the rewards of learning music. Researcher-practitioners must act as agents of change to make noise or to provide a collective voice, so policy makers can no longer ignore such force that demands social change towards providing better music education for all Australian school children. As a researcher

of life writing, I cannot claim total ownership of my story, because I only write my life in relation to others, into a corporate citizenship where we all desire reformation of the Australian/ Victorian education system. My story however, contributes a little knowledge, a little humanity and a little room to move around the heartbreaks of ideologies (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011). Sharing my story that connects with social process, action and change demonstrated the value of autoethnographic research. Autoethnography offers the potential to expand scholarship about human experience (Ellis, 2009). Indeed, the micro-events in my story have the power to impact the macro-social structures and conditions beyond the frame of my story. I must admit I remain just as powerless as my readers in bringing forth significant changes to the Australian education system, if I/we continue to stay in isolation and become disheartened about 'making noise'.

The findings of the current study can support music advocacy in Australia, and provide insight to the preparation of future educators for multicultural Australia. Music is essential in fostering tolerance, empathy, social inclusion, cultural cohesion and harmony amongst people. Educators need to impart genuine intercultural understandings and diverse experiences to all students, cultivate mutual respect among different ethnic groups with linguistic, social and religious diversities, as well as celebrate commonalities and negotiate differences among all. The core teachings of Confucianism – focusing on moral development of an individual, aiming for constant betterment and self-perfection through arts immersion – have important implications for Australian educators. It is crucial that teachers tap into such philosophical and intercultural understandings when interacting with CHC students. Critical reflections from a culture-bearer regarding Asia literacy and understandings (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2014) have immediate applications to empower educators to shift their value systems from mono-cultural to multicultural, from educating local to responsible global citizens of the 21st century, thus leading to the ultimate change of behaviours which would make a difference to Australian students with the majority of them having hybrid identities like me, possessing often multiple languages, cultures, musics and identities.

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